Relations between the Army and the Royal Airforce 1918-1939.

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RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ARMY AND THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

1918 - 1939

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ABSTRACT

In attempting to assess the nature of the relationship between the Army and Air Force during the interwar years, it has been found appropriate to divide the work into three parts.

The first part deals with the years up to 1926, during which time the Air Force fought and won for itself an independent role both at home and overseas. The Air Ministry's case for a separate existence is examined, as is the validity of the Army's opposition to a third service.

The struggle for power in the policing and defence of mandates and colonial territories in the Middle and Far East provides the subject matter for the second part. In tracing the course of this power struggle, no detailed attempt has been made to evaluate the military effectiveness of air control. The main concern here has been to show the effects that this struggle had upon the development of interservice cooperation at the tactical level.

The final part of the work studies the diverging roles of the two services and the repercussions that this divergence had upon relations during the 1930s. In this period, the effects of rearmament upon interservice cooperation are examined, together with the doctrine of limited liability and the policy of strategic bombing upon which it was essentially based.

For the most part, this study of Army-Air Force relations has been confined to Staff and Ministerial levels, but the opinion of junior officers and civilian experts has been sought on specific issues.

Whilst it is not possible to apportion blame precisely for the antagonism which so often served to divide the two departments, this study would suggest that the Army's case in this troubled relationship has not always received the measure of understanding and support to which it is entitled.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The military practice of omitting full stops in abbreviations has been followed throughout this work. This list does not include well-known abbreviations.

AA	Anti-Aircraft
AASF	Advanced Air Striking Force
ACAS	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff
ACM	Air Chief Marshal
ADGB	Air Defence of Great Britain
AIR	Air Ministry Records in PRO
AM	Air Marshal
AMP	Air Member for Personnel
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
AVM	Air Vice Marshal
CAB	Cabinet Records in PRO
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CGS	Chief of the General Staff (India)
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
Cmd	Command Paper
CNS	Chief of the Naval Staff
CO	Colonial Office (including records in PRO)
COS	Chiefs of Staff
CP	Cabinet Paper
DCAS	Deputy Chief of the Air Staff
DDMO	Deputy Director of Military Operations
DDMOI	Deputy Director of Military Operations & Intelligence
DDOI	Deputy Director of Operations and Intelligence
DI(AP)	Defence of India Sub-Committee (Air Power)
DMO	Director of Military Operations
DMOI	Director of Military Operations & Intelligence
DO	Director of Operations
DOI	Director of Operations & Intelligence
DRC	Defence Requirements Sub-Committee of the CID
DSD	Director of Staff Duties
DTSD	Director of Training and Staff Duties
FO	Foreign Office Records in PRO
GCMG	Grand Cross of St.Michael and St.George
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOC-in-C	General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
HC5s	House of Commons, Fifth Series (*Hansard*)
IAF	Independent Air Force
IDC	Imperial Defence College
JIC	Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee
JP	Joint Planning Sub-Committee
MRAF	Marshal of the Royal Air Force
ND	CID Sub-Committee on National and Imperial Defence
PRO	Public Record Office
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RNAS	Royal Naval Air Service
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute
WO	War Office (including records in PRO)

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INTRODUCTION

In tracing the course of the relationship between the Army and the Air Force during the interwar years, two factors of particular significance emerge. Firstly, one is struck by both the intensity and the extent of the rivalry between the two departments. Roskill has described the conflict over the control of naval aviation as "one of the greatest controversies of the interwar years".[1] Deserving of no less a description and with equal if not more important consequences was the "paper and political battle"[2] which raged so ferociously between the Army and the Air Force in the early 1920s, smouldered with varying degrees of intensity for the next fifteen years, and then burst into flames with renewed vigour just a few weeks before the outbreak of the Second World War.

In the immediate postwar years in particular, the Army launched frequent and bitter attacks upon the integrity of the new fledgeling force and upon every attempt it made to carve out for itself a viable and enduring role in both imperial policing and home defence. Of this period Marshal of the RAF Sir John Slessor was later to write:

> ... the fact is that during the formative years we were literally battling for the life of the RAF against the forces of military reaction.[3]

In the matter of imperial policing, the WO struggled to prevent the adoption of air control in the mandate of Mesopotamia and, when their efforts failed, continued a running battle to regain command in this and other Middle East territories where the Air Force had been granted control. Opposition was no less severe in the realm of home defence, where Air Ministry demands for an independent air striking force were challenged both as to the necessity and strength of such a force. In the eyes of the WO the major task of the Air Force was to assist the Army on the field of battle.

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1. Stephen Roskill, *Hankey, Man of Secrets*, Vol.II, p.107.
2. Sir Philip Joubert, *The Third Service*, p.72.
3. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/644, Some Personal Reflections by Sir John Slessor, September 1964, p.6.

The width and intensity of such opposition are not generally appreciated. As a result - and this is the second major factor to emerge from this study - the Army's case in this interservice struggle has largely gone by default. This is understandable, for in this particular instance history has been singularly unkind to the Army. The ultimate success of the RAF in World War II and the undisputed place that the Air Force has come to hold as one of the nation's fighting services have tended to discredit *in toto* the Army's distant battles against an independent air arm. In this respect, hindsight has proved a liability rather than a benefit.

In dealing with this subject, therefore, one is tempted to dismiss the Army's opposition as "destructive and retrogressive"[1] or, at best, to give it a brief mention within a general account of the more dramatic struggle being waged at that time between the Air Force and the Navy. Yet, in the context of its time, such opposition can be readily understood and, in some cases, clearly justified. This is not to suggest that the WO and the General Staff were without blame. One can readily sympathise with the view advanced by one critic that, in these interwar years, the Army had need of an "emetic" to get rid of its old ideas.[2] Nevertheless, a closer study of the relations between these two departments does reveal that the Army's case has much to commend it and that a new balance needs to be struck between the arguments which served to divide these two fighting services in this fitful period of peace between the two great wars.

The Army Council accepted in principle the formation of an independent Air Force at a Cabinet meeting in August 1917, when the second report of the Smuts' Committee on air organisation and home defence was under consideration. As the future was to reveal, it was an act which, as far as the senior Services were concerned, was taken in haste and repented at leisure. Even though the CIGS, General Sir William Robertson, had earlier stated that he accepted

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1. Norman Macmillan, *Sefton Brancker*, p.254
2. Sir William Joynson Hicks, MP, speaking at the Air Conference held at the Guildhall, London, 14 October 1920. See *The Aeroplane*, Vol.XIX, 27 October 1920, p.714. Sir William was then Chairman of the Parliamentary Air Committee.

the need for a separate Air Force,[1] it would appear that the WO as a whole saw this need as simply a makeshift war-time expedient which had no future beyond the ending of hostilities. Furthermore, the Army Council's formal acceptance of a third Service was on the firm understanding that Army interests were to be fully safeguarded as regards both training and *matériel*. Indeed, Robertson only agreed to withdraw an amendment to the Committee's recommendations after he had been assured that the War Office would be responsible for laying down the aircraft requirements of the Army and that, in the words of the report, "the closest attention should be given to the special requirements of the Navy and Army".[2]

Similar concern for the needs of the Army once the Royal Flying Corps had been granted its own wings was voiced by Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, the C-in-C British Armies in France. In a letter to the CIGS on the 15th September, Haig wrote:

> ... there is room for doubt whether coordination under the new scheme will not be even more difficult than under the old and whether the Air Ministry, claiming to be the supreme authority on aerial questions, ... may not override military opinion as to military requirements.[3]

But Haig's remarks, coming as they did from battle HQ, went much further than those of his Chief. The Air Service, he claimed, was as much a part of the Army as were the infantry, artillery and cavalry. The new situation would make for difficulties of command where it most mattered - on the battlefield. It was too much to expect that the relationship between a commander of the Army on the one hand and "attached" units on the other, could ever be quite the same as if those units belonged to the Army and thus looked to the other arms as their comrades, and to the Army authorities as their true masters. There was need, he argued,

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1. Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, Vol.II, p.17. (letter dated 9 July 1917).
2. Cab 23/3, War Cabinet, 223rd Meeting, 24 August 1917. The amendment read: "The Air Ministry shall from time to time attach to the Navy and the Army such air units as are deemed necessary by the Admiralty and War Office respectively for naval or military operations etc."
3. Cab 24/26, War Cabinet, GT 2058.

for a much fuller and clearer definition of the powers of military commanders in regard to air units placed at their disposal than that provided by the report.

Haig questioned, too, the value of independent air action. He could not accept that, in the near future at least, the destruction of industrial and populous centres on a vast scale was likely to become, in the words of the report, "the principal operations of war to which the older forms of military and naval operations may become secondary and subordinate".[1]

Such caution was in marked contrast to the confidence of the air enthusiast. A short time afterwards, the Editor of *Flight Magazine* wrote:

> ... it is easy to foresee the time when the armies shall have ceased to exist except as the hewers of wood and the drawers of water for the Air Service and the latter will have the whole business of fighting to itself. [2]

It was exaggeration of this kind which was to account for much of the Army's hostility towards the new Service throughout the interwar years.

Once the RAF was formed in April 1918, the Air Council became the scene of further clashes on the question of air priority. At the Council's meeting on the 15th July, Major General Ellington expressed doubts as to whether the programme of aircraft development then under discussion was not based on the principle that a decision in war might be obtained by an air offensive for which the Independent Air Force was to be developed. In his view, a decision would be reached by offensive action on the part of the Army. The detachment of aircraft from the Army to the IAF required to be carefully watched lest the result should be a weakening of the Army's offensive power. In subsequent discussion it was indeed disclosed that the latest development programme implied a reduction of 14 squadrons of fighting machines allotted to the Army and that there were grounds for the view that the allocation of strength to

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1. Cab 24/26, War Cabinet, GT 2058.
2. *Flight Magazine*, Vol.X, 4 April 1918, p.358.

the IAF was "on the liberal side".[1]

The following month, General Sir Henry Wilson, recently appointed CIGS, claimed that the Air Ministry's proposals fell short of Army requirements by 24 squadrons and that the bulk of this reduction, some 19 squadrons, was at the expense of the British armies in France. This reduction appeared to be for the benefit of the IAF despite the fact that all recent experience had shown the value of direct cooperation by the RAF in the ground battle. "However important the operations of the IAF may be," he wrote in his note, "I must emphasise the vital necessity of subordinating them to the requirements of the Army when critical military operations are in progress."[2]

Such fears concerning the allocation of aircraft to direct cooperation with the Army appear to be justified, and were not to be allayed over the years. Nor, at this stage, were they confined to Army officers. Major General Sir John Salmond complained bitterly about the number of bombers being allocated to strategic bombing. The war, he argued, would be won on the Western Front; his Command should be receiving every plane available.[3] Lord Trenchard himself, then General commanding the IAF, is on record as recognising severe limitations on the part to be played by his Force at this time and, indeed, of being opposed to its very formation for fear that it would be to the detriment of the field forces.[4] With Trenchard, however, the motives determining his attitude appear to have been more complex and may well have stemmed basically from a determination to keep the new Air Force out of the Army's clutches. Whilst he favoured the bombing of Germany,[5] he feared that the creation of an Independent Force to do this work might well jeopardise the very existence of a

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1. Air 6/13, Air Council, 39th Meeting, 15 July 1918.
2. Cab 24/61, War Cabinet, GT 5495, Note by CIGS, 24 August 1918.
3. John Laffin, *Swifter than Eagles*, p.130. Unless otherwise stated, all references to Salmond in this work refer to Sir John Salmond.
4. Trenchard Papers, CI/10/3, Private Diary, 11 November 1918: "Thus the Independent Force comes to an end. A more gigantic waste of effort and personnel there has never been in any war."
5. Ibid., 13 July 1918: ".. the bombing of Germany is now a necessity."

separate air service. Some years later he told the RAF's official historian, H.A.Jones:

> My view was that if you split your air service into tuppeny ha'penny parts, you would soon have the Army requesting control of their part. .. Had they seen my command growing, as it must have grown, they would have said, ".. What can you know about running the air forces which are working on our immediate front and are definitely and solely for our use? You have got your part, let us have ours." It was for that reason and for that reason alone that I objected to dispersing the Air Force.[1]

This point of view is partly borne out by a diary entry made by Trenchard in June 1918 in which he argues that a divided Air Force would "do a lot of harm and that spirit will shortly spread from HQ to Squadrons".[2]

If such were indeed the true motives of the man destined to take charge of the country's airpower the following year and to shape its development for a decade, then such deep-seated fears must go a long way to account for the Air Staff's relentless efforts to keep the Air Force in one piece long after the independence of the new arm had been assured. But the sheer severity of the interservice rivalry which broke out when war came to an end and the battle over peacetime establishments began cannot be explained away by the motives of one man. The coming of airpower meant not only a new weapon on the battlefield, but an extension of the battlefield itself. In essence, the long and bitter conflict between the two services was the product of a fundamental change - the impact of a third dimension upon the keeping of peace and the waging of war.

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1. Air 8/179, Interview with Lord Trenchard. Dictated notes by H.A.Jones on Policy of the Independent Air Force, 11 April 1934. See also conversation between Liddell Hart and Trenchard in which Trenchard refers to his interview with Jones and states that he objected strongly to the IAF because it infringed the idea that the air was all one. He regarded it essential that the Air Force should be universal, supplying contingents for military and naval use as well as for their own operations. See Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1935/86, 27 June 1935.
2. Trenchard Papers, CI/10/3, Private Diary, 18 June 1918.

PART I

THE SURVIVAL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, 1918-1926

Chapter 1

The Growth of Army Opposition to a Third Service
November 1918 - May 1922

With the coming of peace in November 1918, the Air Ministry could spare little thought as to how it might or might not share its diverse responsibilities. The first concern of the newly formed Air Force was to survive as a force at all. The Air Ministry set its sights high. A week before the Armistice the Air Council proposed a postwar Air Force of no less than 348 squadrons - an actual increase of 154 squadrons, the majority of which was to expand the air fleet required for home defence and the provision of a striking force.[1] A month later the CAS, Major General F.H. Sykes, submitted a memo to the Cabinet on the airpower requirements of the Empire. Even at this early stage, the Air Ministry was laying claim to the two fundamental tenets of its future role - the need for an independent striking force and the right of the Air Force to a place in imperial policing and defence. The Air Force, claimed Sykes, must be the first line of defence of the British Empire. In any future war, however near or distant, the existence of the nation would depend largely upon airpower. Furthermore, in the matter of imperial defence, certain Middle East states offered considerable scope for police work.[2]

Amid the euphoria of peace, however, such wild claims and predictions rang strangely hollow. They prompted no response from the WO - already burdened with a string of operations around the globe - and the Cabinet was not impressed. The scheme was virtually "stillborn". Indeed, even the most ardent of air enthusiasts, C.G. Grey, spoke out against an all-embracing Air Force. The naval, army and independent branches of the air service must be kept distinctly separate, he maintained, "so as to ensure competition in efficiency between the three".[3] By the beginning of 1919, the Secretary of State for the RAF, Lord Weir, was admitting to his Cabinet colleagues that despite the good case made out for a very strong postwar Air Force, a balance had to be struck between how much the country should spend and how much the country could spend.[4] In the event, what the country did spend was meagre by comparison.

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1. Air 6/13, Air Council, 57th Meeting, 4 November 1918.
2. Cab 24/71, GT 6477, 9 December 1918.
3. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XVI, 5 March 1919, p.939.
4. Cab 24/72/2, GT 6591, 3 January 1919.

Comforted by the Ten Year Rule, the government of the day was prepared to run down the establishment and equipment of the Air Force to just one tenth of its wartime size. With the replacement of Lord Weir by Mr. Winston Churchill a week later, the disintegration of the Air Force began.[1] Reductions were put in hand which were to cut back the force to 25½ squadrons and less than 27,000 officers and men.[2] In a matter of months the Force was to be left with "a picturesque new uniform and an incorrigibly unsound view of its capabilities".[3]

Even the prospect of such drastic reductions was not sufficient, however, to mollify concern in some Army quarters. By mid-1919 the real and potential effects of a separate Air Force upon the limited funds available brought protest from the Army. In a letter to his Secretary of State, the Quartermaster General complained bitterly of the tendency on the part of the Air Ministry to set up their own administrative services for all purposes. He wrote:

> The Air Force when it comes down out of the sky must clearly have its territorial requirements provided for by the Army. ... this separation, which has been growing in strength during the last few months, is wrong in principle and wasteful in practice.[4]

The QMG's remarks, retorted the new CAS in a note to his own political chief, were apparently based on the assumption that the Air Force existed entirely for cooperation with the Army. It had to be accepted by both the parent services that the Air Force must be allowed to work out its own salvation as an independent force and not as an appendage of either the Army or the Navy. It had to be borne in mind that the Army charged the Air Force for all services rendered, and that this made the difference in cost practically negligible.[5]

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1. For a time chart showing the periods of office of the Ministers and Chiefs of Staff of the two Services, 1919-1939, see Appendix to this work, p.311.
2. Andrew Boyle, *Trenchard*, p.354, and Brooke-Popham Papers, VII/22.
3. Basil Collier, *Heavenly Adventurer: Sefton Brancker and the Dawn of British Aviation*, p.159.
4. Air 8/2, Part V, QMG to Secretary of State for War, 25 July 1919.
5. Ibid., Trenchard to Secretary of State RAF, 30 July 1919.

In its endeavour to work out its own salvation, the Air Force found a staunch ally in Winston Churchill. Appointed joint Secretary of State for War and the RAF on the clear understanding from the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, that the Air Ministry was not to be kept as a separate department,[1] he set his sights on giving the new service a chance to survive. A man "obsessed with the immediate",[2] it would appear that he was motivated more by the need for economy and the political recognition he would gain by its achievement than by any profound belief in independent airpower at that time.[3] Whatever his true motives, however, the assistance he rendered to the new service must be regarded as life-saving. The Air Force, he stated on taking office, stood alone and midway between the land and sea services. Where they clashed, it ruled. Given superior thinking power and knowledge, it must obtain the primary place in the general concept of war policy. In the meantime the first duty of the RAF was to garrison the British Empire.[4]

In a flurry of memoranda towards the end of the year, Minister and Chief of Staff outlined the future role of the new service as they saw it. Trenchard, anxious to find some essential job of work with which to justify the very existence of his depleted Force, argued that whilst the day was still distant when the Air Force would play a predominant role in European warfare, as far as policing overseas was concerned, it was quite capable of carrying out small operations more economically and more expeditiously than troops acting on the ground.[5] In these early blueprints, it must be noted, Trenchard clearly held out the promise of separate air arms for the two older services. It was a promise he was not to keep.

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1. Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis: The Aftermath*, p.52.
2. Robert Rhodes James, *Churchill, A Study in Failure*, p.134.
3. See letter to Lloyd George, 29 December 1918, in which Churchill states, "aeroplanes will never be a substitute for armies and can only be a valuable accessory ..", Lord Beaverbrook, *Men and Power*, p.361.
4. Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill*, Vol.IV, p.197.
5. Trenchard Papers, CII/1/4, Memo by CAS, 14 August 1919. Major General Sir Hugh Trenchard was appointed CAS 31 March 1919. He became AVM on 4 August 1919 and was promoted AM a week later.

In his White Paper of December 1919, he envisaged small but specially trained portions of the RAF "probably becoming, in the future, an arm of the older services".[1] No guarantee was given, however, and Trenchard was later to admit that the statement was "a sop to the jealousy of the older services".[2] It was to become evident by the battle he was to wage against both senior services that he was determined to keep the RAF one and indivisible. In the meantime, Churchill argued that the Air Force was not merely a means of conveyance, but a force capable of influencing profoundly the strategy of the future.[3] Together with the CAS he began to hammer out a scheme based on aeroplanes, armoured cars and local levies whereby the control of the vast new mandated territory of Mesopotamia could be transferred from the WO to the Air Ministry.

Thus by early December, when Churchill presented to both Houses a scheme for the permanent organisation of the RAF, the paper work for the new service appeared to offer some promise of a more settled future.[4] But Parliament proved unreceptive to the ambitions of the new arm, and the scheme - now publicly spelt out in some detail - only served to fan the smouldering doubts and fears long harboured by the Army and Navy. It was at this juncture in fact, as Slessor was later to point out, that the rivalry between the new and old services burst into flames and "the struggle for money began".[5] As one authority was to put it, after two years of peace, "the warlike instincts" of the service departments began to find an outlet in interdepartmental strife.[6]

At a meeting between the three Chiefs of Staff held in December the growing animosity towards the continued existence of a third service was clearly revealed - if one is to believe Trenchard's account.[7] An appeal for twelve months truce in which to allow the RAF to prove its worth or fall by the wayside was

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1. Cmd.467, 19 December 1919 (PRO: ZHC 1/8109, p.849).
2. H. Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars*, p.63.
3. Trenchard Papers, CII/1, Memo by Secretary of State for Air to Cabinet, 24 October 1919.
4. Cmd.467, 19 December 1919.
5. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/644, Some Personal Reflections by Sir John Slessor, p.7.
6. Lord Thomson, *Air Facts and Problems*, p.43.
7. Boyle, op.cit., pp.349-50.

grudgingly conceded by Admiral Beatty. Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson would promise nothing and wrote in his diary a few weeks later:

> Trenchard to see me this morning. He is in desperation about the Air Service, he can neither get the officers nor the men. Of course, this separate Air Service is hopeless.[1]

Six days later, at a further meeting between the Chiefs of Staff, Trenchard was bluntly told by both his colleagues that a third service was not a "workable proposition".[2] In February the CIGS sent a letter to the Air Ministry to put the Air Force in its proper place. It explained that, whilst the Army Council shared the Air Council's enthusiasm as to the future role of the RAF - particularly as it promised to lighten the heavy burden then being borne by the military forces - the problem in the first instance was "the practical conduct of warlike operations at the present time". For the moment it was the Army which formed the principal instrument of warfare on land, and the aerial forces must act in an auxiliary capacity.[3]

In the same month, however, the Editor of *Flight Magazine* launched a bitter attack upon the Army leadership. In the very near future, he claimed, the only fighting factors that would count would be the armies and navies that flew. He continued:

> Mr. Churchill and his "brass hat" friends have been brought up among foot soldiers and horse soldiers. They cannot understand the air soldier, his method of fighting, and his command of all war in the future. They are angry and are trying to suppress what they cannot understand.[4]

One of the major causes of friction at this time was Trenchard's serious lack of manpower. During the drastic reductions made in the establishment, many capable officers, faced with dwindling prospects, had left the service. A suggestion that the

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1. Wilson Diary, 2 January 1920.
2. Ibid., 8 January 1920.
3. Trenchard Papers, CII/1/22, WO to Air Ministry, 21 February 1920.
4. *Flight Magazine*, Vol.XII, 12 February 1920, p.169.

WO should loan the Air Service some 300 to 400 officers was scornfully received by the CIGS. "The sooner the Air Force crashes the better," Wilson wrote in his diary, "It is a wicked waste of money as run at present."[1] Three days later he went across to the Admiralty to discuss the matter with Lord Beatty and found him "very hostile to the proposal".[2] Both began to cast covetous eyes upon that portion of the Defence Vote which had slipped from their grasp under the stresses and strains of war.

The following month, at a meeting of the CID, Churchill prophesied that the air service was destined to grow and that in the future it would be necessary to curtail the functions of both the Navy and Army.[3] On the same day he wrote a strong letter of protest to Wilson following a WO complaint that the Air Force was not strong enough to meet Army needs. When the Air Force attempted to strengthen themselves, he pointed out, the Army Council objected. He was at a loss to know what he (Wilson) wanted done.[4] The General Staff had second thoughts. In October, Lt.General Sir Philip Chetwode informed a meeting at the Guildhall that the Army was supplying the officers required by the RAF. At the same time, he stressed the need for more interservice training.[5]

But such training was not likely to loom large in the eyes of the Air Staff. By the end of the year Trenchard had drastically updated his earlier views concerning the importance of the Air Service as a war-winning instrument. What, he asked a meeting of the CID, was the most serious menace to the Empire at that time? Was it the danger of invasion; the danger to the country's waterborne commerce; or was it, perhaps, the danger of air attack

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1. Wilson Diary, 7 May 1920.
2. Ibid., 10 May 1920. Two days earlier, however, Wilson had written to his Secretary of State, "... we should of course wish to help in every way we can. We propose to write to the Air Ministry to this effect." See Trenchard Papers, II/27/46.
3. Cab 2/3, CID 133rd Meeting, 29 June 1920.
4. Wilson Papers, 18c/4, Churchill to Wilson, 29 June 1920.
5. *The Aeroplane*, Vol.XIX, 27 October 1920, p.714. The meeting was held on 14 October. Chetwode was appointed DCIGS at the end of the month.

the moment war had been declared?[1] The Committee was left in no doubt as to Trenchard's answer. In March the following year in a memo to the CID the Air Staff went further and, in the opinion of the WO and Admiralty, too far. The Air Force, it claimed, was the first defence against invasion from the sea and the only defence against invasion from the air. Furthermore, encouraged by the recent success of air operations in Somaliland, the memo claimed that there were responsibilities assigned to the Army which the Air Service was already technically capable of undertaking. The efficacy of the RAF as an independent arm should be put to the test in such territories as Mesopotamia, Transjordan and the Indian Frontier.[2]

Such confidence in the present and future capabilities of the air arm was not shared by some sections of public opinion, however. When Churchill gave up the dual office of Secretary of State for War and Air in February, a *Times* editorial dismissed his rule at the Air Ministry as "inadequate". British flying, it maintained, was almost down to its last gasp. "From its attenuated frame the soul has all but departed."[3]

Nor was the Army slow to react. The Air Staff paper, circulated at a CID meeting early in May,[4] provoked a scathing attack by the General Staff upon the purpose and integrity of the RAF. Understandably alarmed by the growing immensity of the Air Ministry's claims, particularly with reference to the Army's sacred preserves along the Indian Frontier, the CIGS revealed the width and depth of military feeling against the third Service. The Air Force, stated Wilson in a memo to the CID, was pursuing a separatist policy in every respect, strategically, administratively and socially. Such separatism was inimical to effective cooperation and, by duplication of staffs, extremely wasteful. It was conceded that aircraft could in some circumstances replace other military arms. The reconnaissance task of the cavalry, for example, could often be more effectively performed by aircraft, and bombing,

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1. Cab 2/3, CID 134th Meeting, 14 December 1920.
2. Cab 5/4, CID Paper 135-C, March 1921.
3. *The Times*, Editorial, 5 April 1921.
4. Cab 2/3, CID 137th Meeting, 6 May 1921.

whilst lacking in precision, could replace the fire of long range guns, but this did not justify a separate organism. As regards the controlling of uncivilised or partly uncivilised countries, the Air Force had not yet made good its claim. Here again, the value of aircraft lay in tactical cooperation with ground forces. Whilst the General Staff had agreed to the proposals of the Cairo Conference in order to give an opportunity for the RAF to experiment, the WO remained "frankly agnostic in respect of the Air Ministry's creed". Furthermore, argued the General Staff, defence against air raids was only one item in a large problem of home defence. Aircraft might play a most active part in such defence, but the supply and protection of their HQ, depots and communications were military responsibilities. In any case, it was inconceivable that airpower alone could force the surrender of a nation, even if its power were enhanced one hundred fold. Though London might be laid in ruins, final victory could only be won by the enemy's army occupying the country or by means of a successful sea blockade.[1]

The reply by the Air Staff came in a further memo to the CID that same month. The General Staff were living in the past, claimed Trenchard. Future war would be a conflict of nations and not purely a contest between armies and fleets. Nor were the Army correct in their assertions concerning imperial policing. The Air Staff could rightly point out that the only reason why air control was being introduced in certain countries was because the cost of military occupation had proved prohibitive. As to the question of the Army's role in the supply and protection of ground installations, the Air Staff argued that if such an assertion were taken to its logical conclusion, the General Staff would be able to claim command of naval vessels simply because they were responsible for the defence of such naval bases as Hong Kong and Malta. Complaints concerning difficulties of command also testified to ignorance on the part of the General Staff. The Air Staff fully agreed that the Army should have control of air forces allotted to tactical cooperation. It was only when aircraft were used as a primary arm that the necessity for air control was claimed.[2]

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1. Cab 5/4, CID Paper 139-C, 26 May 1921.
2. Ibid., 141-C, May 1921.

This welter of argument and counter argument came before a meeting of the CID in June and, not surprisingly, resulted in deadlock. All that could be agreed was that the views of the WO and the Air Ministry were too divergent to admit of any conclusions being accepted unanimously on the subject of the future role of the Air Force in imperial defence.[1] At the Committee's next meeting, Mr. Balfour, Lord President of the Council, undertook to write a paper on the subject in the hope that this might assist in reaching an agreement.[2]

Meanwhile, the Air Staff continued to prepare the way for an expansion of what Trenchard called "the central force", that fleet of aircraft allotted to home defence as a means of counter-offensive. Whilst admitting that there was no immediate danger, the Air Ministry warned that "the bolt from the blue" would become a real possibility once France or any other continental power had to be reckoned with as a potential enemy.[3] "The frocks," bemoaned Wilson in a letter to General Lord Rawlinson, C-in-C India, "go on their way squandering millions and millions on an Air Force which gets steadily worse and ... out of touch with both soldiers and sailors as time goes on."[4]

Two weeks later one of these "frocks", Mr. Balfour, in his promised paper to the CID, gave the CIGS further cause for concern. The General Staff, he declared, were apt to minimise the military effects on the country by air raids successfully carried out on a large scale. He felt that the Air Force must be autonomous in matters of administration and education and that, in the case of air defence, the Army and Navy must play a secondary role. On the question of an independent Air Force he wrote:

> I am convinced that any attempt to reduce the new force to an inferior position will seriously hamper its vigorous development and put us at a serious disadvantage compared with nations who, for whatever reason, have abandoned rivalry at sea and desire to

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1. Cab 2/3, CID 142nd Meeting, 17 June 1921.
2. Ibid., 143rd Meeting, 22 July 1921.
3. Air 5/166, Air Ministry Memorandum, June 1921.
4. Wilson Papers, 13e/1, Wilson to Rawlinson, 12 July 1921.

> explore to the utmost the new weapon whose edge cannot be completely turned by the hostile superiority in fleets or armies.[1]

The Air Staff were delighted with the paper. An Air Ministry note to AVM Sir John Salmond, AOC Inland Area, viewed the report as "remarkably satisfactory" and "a very long step in the right direction".[2] In fact, Balfour's verdict might well have been anticipated. During the war he had, indeed, been a strong opponent of the idea of a separate Air Force,[3] but later, at the Versailles Conference, he had voiced deep concern about the frightful potential of airpower.[4] As a convert to the potentiality of strategic bombing he was not likely to cast aside the very means by which the nation could develop a deterrent or counter-offensive capability.

Not surprisingly, the General Staff were "reluctantly obliged to disagree" with Balfour's conclusions (as was the Admiralty). Mr. Balfour, they claimed, viewed the problem through "the rarified atmosphere of speculative theory" whereas the General Staff were confined to "the bedrock of stubborn facts". One of these "stubborn facts", they pointed out, was that Army personnel in AA defences outnumbered that of the RAF by 20 to 1. It was the combination of gunfire, searchlights and aeroplanes which was essential for effective defence of the air. Indeed, out of the 1,737 planes which had attempted to intercept the attacking aircraft in the last two years of the war, 91.7% had never seen the enemy. Was it not possible, too, that before aerial attack had reached the gigantic proportions suggested by the Air Ministry, science might have devised a correspondingly effective antidote?

Turning to the question of "savage warfare", the General Staff resorted to a line of argument which, whilst not wholly justified by events, was highly emotive and certain to bring them support from outside as well as inside military circles. The method of air

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1. Cab 5/4, CID Paper 149-C, 26 July 1921.
2. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/143/1, 17 August 1921.
3. See Blanche E.C. Dugdale, *James Arthur Balfour*, Vol.II, p.158, and Boyle, op.cit., p.398.
4. Barry D. Powers, *Strategy Without Slide Rule*, p.180.

control in these circumstances, they contended, was merely a means of propaganda or an instrument of terrorism. It was indiscriminate and wanting in precision and, as a consequence, resulted in the bombing of women and children. Furthermore, in Mesopotamia, where air control was to be attempted, the whole fabric of the scheme was based on the action of military forces. Arab levies and the Arab Army totalled 9,500 compared with some 2,900 RAF personnel.

The General Staff insisted that they wished to see the new science of the air exploited to the full, but its growth should be fostered "on practical and wholesome lines". If grafted on the well-established and war-proven stocks of the older services, the young shoots of the RAF would draw increasing strength and nourishment. What was required, concluded the memo, was as much Air Force and as little Air Ministry as the country could afford, and this could only be achieved by a searching enquiry into the financial effects entailed in having a separate Air Force.[1]

This memo, severely criticising as it did the two major roles claimed by the Air Ministry, and calling into question as it did the integrity of the new Service in managing its own affairs, provoked a strong note of protest from Trenchard to his Minister. Referring to Wilson he wrote:

> ... one cannot argue with an Army officer who cannot see beyond the walls of his office, who cannot realise the value of mechanical appliances in substitution of manpower; who thinks in mere masses of men, who has no conception of the value of speed and time ...

The General Staff, he warned, were out to stop any increase in squadrons by transplanting the Air Force into "the inhospitable soil of the General Staff's nursery garden".[2]

However, in a minute to his political chief, Captain F.E. Guest, circulated to the CID on the 18th October, Trenchard simply stated that he was not prepared to indulge in "these unprofitable

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1. Cab 5/4, CID Paper 150-C, 28 September 1921. The Admiralty added their support the following month. Ibid., CID Paper 153-C, 7 October 1921.
2. Air 9/5, Folio 6, CAS to Secretary of State for Air, September 1921.

paper polemics". Confining himself to the General Staff's call for a searching enquiry, he welcomed the proposal provided that it embraced all three Services. This, he countered, would reveal the economy to be gained by transferring to the Air Ministry certain WO functions. It was time that one left the "ruts of an obsolete dogmatism".[1]

In fact, the opportunity for the Air Ministry to show what savings could be achieved was already at hand in the shape of the Geddes Committee, appointed early in August with the task of reducing Government expenditure by some £60 million a year. The Committee, the instrument of the Government's campaign against waste, would most certainly have turned its attention to defence spending in the course of its investigation, but the interservice disputes within the CID, centred as they were around accusations of financial extravagance, undoubtedly ensured a more searching enquiry than was originally intended. The wisdom of the General Staff in bringing so strong a spotlight to bear upon Service finances and, more to the point, in linking this enquiry to the whole matter of Air Force independence, is open to question, particularly so soon after the Balfour findings.[2] On the other hand, it certainly gave the WO a further opportunity to argue that the most effective and economical use could not be made of the Air Arm so long as the personnel concerned were controlled by another Ministry. To a Committee bent on drastic reductions in expenditure, the extra costs involved in the overlapping of services between the Air Force and the Army appeared, on the face of it, attractive growth for the Geddes axe.

The Air Ministry, however, could point to more tangible evidence in the way of savings. They could claim, with some justification, that the operations in Somaliland in February 1920, based as they had been on a method of air control, had achieved success for an outlay of £36,000, a fraction of the cost envisaged

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1. Cab 5/4, CID Paper 151-C, 18 October 1921.
2. Roskill feels strongly that for Beatty, who had openly supported Wilson's claims of RAF extravagance, it was a misconceived move. See Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, Vol.I, p.267.

by the WO.[1] In Mesopotamia, too, an Army scheme involving two divisions at an annual cost of some £20 million was shortly to be replaced by a system of air control estimated to cost but a quarter of that sum.

In advancing the merits of their scheme in Mesopotamia, the Air Ministry received firm support from the Colonial Office. In a letter to the Geddes Committee in October, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Winston Churchill, who, only a few months earlier had been largely instrumental in getting the scheme off the ground, testified to the large economies to be made by the RAF in the Middle East Mandate. The Army, he contended, was prone to show the limitations of airpower and to adhere to more traditional and expensive methods of control. He claimed that to keep the new arm, with its measureless possibilities, in perpetual thraldom would be to rob it of its most important developments.[2]

But the strongest weapon in the Air Ministry's arsenal - and one which had played the predominant part in convincing both Smuts and Balfour of the need for a separate service - was the development of airpower as a primary means to counter air attack from a hostile European neighbour. In this the Air Ministry was assisted by the current concern being shown over the overwhelming superiority of the French Air Force. In this context above all, argued the Air Staff, the Army underrated and misunderstood the potentialities of the air service as an independent arm. It saw no further than its own limited horizon. Reversion of the Air Force to the two older services would mean that the "birthright of air supremacy" would be thrown away.[3] To supporters of the air cause, this last point presented a very real danger. Trenchard, for example, feared that without independence the Air Force would never be anything more than Army scouts, artillery observers and short range bombers.[4] Slessor is convinced that if the RAF had been split

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1. The extent of RAF success in Somaliland is open to question. See this work, pp.35-40.
2. Air 8/2, Part IV, Churchill to Geddes Committee, 24 October 1921.
3. Ibid., Notes by Air Staff on the Main Policy Observations by Committee on National Expenditure, 19 October 1921.
4. C.G. Grey, *A History of the Air Ministry*, p.185.

up after the First World War it would have suffered the fate of the Tank Corps.[1]

In a timely paper to the CID at the end of October, the Air Staff returned to the threat of air attack, spelling out more precisely the dangers to which, in their estimation, the country might be exposed. The air offensive in the future, they warned, would be a sustained attack day after day, night after night. Herein lay the greatest danger to the nation, and it could only be countered by carrying the war into the enemy's homeland in order to force him onto a defensive role.[2] Duly impressed, the CID agreed in November that a special committee should be appointed to go fully into the question of Britain's vulnerability to air attack.[3]

Sensing the need to counter the Air Staff's emphasis upon a facet of airpower doctrine in which neither of the two senior services could claim a part, Wilson decided to seek more radical support from the Navy. He had a meeting with the Deputy CNS, Vice Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, early in November and, according to his diary, gained his full support in a scheme to share the Air Force between them, leaving a civil Air Minister or Under-Secretary to work under the Board of Trade.[4] Then a few days later in a speech at Amiens, where he had gone to unveil a memorial to men of the Ulster Division, he launched a fierce attack upon bombing as a weapon of war. Soldiers, he claimed, did not like it; they much preferred to fight matters out for themselves. Then, with the Washington Conference clearly in mind, he asked those who governed the actions of the world to consider whether it would not be better to limit aeroplanes rather than submarines. The development of the aeroplane was the development of a means of killing women and children.[5]

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1. Marshal of the RAF, Sir John Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p.46.
2. Cab 5/4, CID Paper 156-C, 31 October 1921.
3. Cab 2/3, CID 148th Meeting, 9 November 1921.
4. Wilson Diary, 8 November 1921.
5. *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 November 1921.

Trenchard was furious at what he considered to be a public expression of disagreement with the Government's avowed belief that the effective limitation of aerial armaments was impracticable. In a statement sent to the Secretary of State for Air for circulation to the Cabinet, he complained bitterly that from the beginning of 1919 the Field Marshal had consistently shown implacable animosity towards the Air Force, both in public and private. The speech was only a phase in a protracted campaign against the Air Force, a campaign in which he was prepared to use any and every weapon upon which he could lay his hands and to snatch at every pretext for criticising the new service. The letter concluded:

> How much easier our task would have been and would be in the future if the older Services had always said, "How can we help you?" instead of saying, "How can we destroy you?"[1]

An editorial in *The Aeroplane* gave the matter a more public airing. To drag the bombing of women and children into the speech as an argument against building an adequate air fleet for self defence, wrote the Editor, was "a piece of nonconformist hypocrisy worthy of an Ulsterman preaching to an Ulster audience".[2]

Wilson, shown a draft of the statement by his Minister, sent a letter of apology to Trenchard in which he alleged that he had been misquoted. "I had not dreamt," he wrote, "that my remarks could be twisted by any friend or enemy into an attack on the Air Ministry."[3] Trenchard accepted the apology with commendable good grace.[4] Not so the Editor of *The Aeroplane*. He called for the resignation of the CIGS for the good of both the Air Force and the Army.[5]

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1. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/163, Trenchard to Secretary of State for Air, 24 November 1921.
2. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XXI, 7 December 1921, p.558.
3. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/163, Wilson to Trenchard, 25 November 1921.
4. Ibid., Trenchard to Wilson, 26 November 1921.
5. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XXI, 21 December 1921, p.612.

The full conclusions of the Geddes report became known early in 1922. Despite agitation in the Press alleging "Chaos in the Air Force",[1] the Committee rejected the allegations made by the General Staff and, indeed, complimented the Air Ministry upon the economy it exercised in its administration. Nevertheless, a reduction of £5½ million was recommended in the Air Estimates for 1922-23. In addition, a reduction of 8½ squadrons was proposed, to be taken - significantly - from units allocated to the Army and Navy.[2] As far as relations between the Services were concerned, the report considered that the answer lay in the establishment of a Ministry of Defence, and thus came out in favour of a unified Air Service both as a substitute for certain land and sea forces and as an organisation capable of working out developments which might "revolutionise methods of attack and defence" in the foreseeable future.[3]

The cuts in aircraft strength were strongly opposed by the Air Ministry. They regarded such a reduction as a "doubtful and dangerous form of economy" at a time when the Air Force was being asked to take over increasing responsibility.[4] But though the efficiency of the Force might be impaired, it had survived: its role as a separate, distinct force had again been recognised. There ran through the report "almost as a guiding thread", as one observer put it, the realisation of the future importance of the RAF.[5]

Wilson wrote to General Lord Rawlinson at the end of January 1922: "You ask what has happened to the independent air force.

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1. *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 January 1922.
2. As far as the Army was concerned, the Committee recommended a reduction of 50,000 officers and men out of 217,500 (exclusive of 71,500 British troops serving in India). See Peter Dennis, *Decision by Default*, p.12. Wilson termed the report "fantastic, crude and inaccurate". See Wilson Diary, 22 December 1921.
3. Cmd.1581, 14 December 1921.
4. Air 19/111, Comments of Air Ministry on Report of Geddes Committee, para,4.
5. *Flight Magazine*, Editorial, Vol.XIV, 16 February 1922, p.95.

As Winston presumably drafted Eric Geddes' report on the air so the air remains as a separate ministry."[1] The allegation appears unlikely. However, the following month a Cabinet Committee chaired by Churchill was set up to review the findings of the Geddes Committee and came out against any further cuts as far as the Air estimates were concerned.[2]

Undeterred, the WO lost no time in returning to the attack. The Army chiefs were anxious and determined to force the matter to Cabinet level. Early in February, seizing on the fact that the Geddes Committee had referred to the serious overlapping and duplication within the three services, the WO made an all out take-over bid. In a memo to the CID, the Secretary of State for War, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, proposed the outright transfer of the military functions of the Air Ministry to the WO. The problem could best be solved, he argued, by making the WO responsible for the functions of military advice and administration then performed by the Air Ministry. To ensure, however, that the views of the Air Service were adequately represented, he proposed that the CAS should be a Deputy CIGS with a seat on the Army Council. He claimed that merely by transferring certain common services to the WO - those of intelligence, discipline, medical care, transport, supply, contracts and chaplains - there would be an immediate saving of £1½ million and that further savings would be made in subsequent years. He also forecast a saving of £333,000 a year by spreading the work of the Air Ministry over the WO and Admiralty.

Quite apart from such savings, however, the Minister felt that real progress in military aviation would be greater if the friction inevitable between the older and newer services were replaced by "an undivided responsibility and single control". The war had proved in principle that cooperation between the Army and the Air Force was vital and that in order to achieve this the air units had, without exception, to be under the military commander in chief.[3]

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1. Wilson Papers, 13f/35, Wilson to Rawlinson, 31 January 1922.
2. Cab 24/132, CP 3692 and CP 3692A, February 1922.
3. Cab 5/4, CID Paper 159-C, 4 February 1922.

As on the previous occasion, the Air Ministry would not be drawn into a long argument with the WO. "I do not know that this perpetual controversy is good for either of the Services or that it leads to anything but discord," wrote Guest in a memo to the CID. The Secretary of State for War, he said, ignored the opinions expressed by the Geddes Committee. Nor had he mentioned the fact that the principle of a separate air service had been accepted by the WO when the formation of the RAF was under discussion. Guest concluded:

> ... economies are more likely to result from willing and sympathetic cooperation between the three services than from conditions brought about by these constant efforts to create friction and discord by advocating the abolition of the Air Ministry whenever an opportunity presents itself. [1]

The Admiralty, also faced with the necessity of making drastic cuts in their estimates, joined the WO in their attacks on the Air Force. Unlike the Army, however, and contrary to the understanding reached earlier between Wilson and Keyes, the Sea Lords took what might be regarded as a more realistic view. They sought not the abolition of the Air Ministry as a whole, but the right to supply and administer their own Air Service. [2]

At a cabinet meeting early in March the whole question was aired once more. The Secretary of State for War complained that he had had great difficulty in obtaining a few aeroplanes to take part in experimental tactical exercises that year. If the Air Force were regarded as one of the military arms, like the cavalry and artillery, such difficulties would be avoided. For his part, the Secretary of State for Air urged that a firm decision in favour of a separate Air Service should be given by the Cabinet. Only then would friction between the Services diminish and the coordination of their activities be made easier. [3]

An essay in the *RUSI Journal* at this time followed the same

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1. Cab 5/4, CID Paper 161-C, 11 February 1922.
2. Ibid., Paper 160-C, 6 February 1922.
3. Cab 23/29, Cabinet Meeting 16(22), 8 March 1922.

line of argument. Written by a young Air Force officer, it claimed that the best use of airpower could only be made when it was in the hands of those who, by making a study of its application, understood its value and its limitations.[1]

At a Cabinet meeting in mid-March it was decided, despite continued opposition from both the Army and the Navy, that the principles formulated by Lord Balfour should be approved and that a sub-committee should be appointed to enquire into the existing system of naval and air cooperation. On the vexed question of a separate Air Ministry, however, the Cabinet were not prepared to "lay down a policy for all time".[2] The following day in the House of Commons, Mr Austen Chamberlain announced the Cabinet's decision in a speech which has been called the Magna Carta of the Air Force.[3] The Government, stated the Lord Privy Seal, was convinced that in the future the greatest danger to the country might well be from the action of air forces rather than of naval and military forces. He referred also to the growing success of the Air Force in carrying out independent action in Mesopotamia and continued:

> If the air service were reabsorbed by the Navy and Army, this aspect of the service to be rendered by the Air Force would inevitably be relegated to the background.[4]

The decision of the Government to confine the enquiry to naval and air cooperation was taken because it was felt that at that time there was not likely to be any need for a further committee of enquiry with regard to the Army.[5] This was not a view shared by the new CIGS, General Lord Cavan. At a meeting of the Army Council at the end of May, he suggested that the terms of reference of the proposed sub-committee should be extended to cover the system of military and air cooperation. He argued that the need for such

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1. Flight Lieutenant C.J. Mackay, "The Influence in the Future of Aircraft upon the Problems of Imperial Defence", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXVII, May 1922, p.285.
2. Cab 23/29, Cabinet Meeting 18(22), 15 March 1922.
3. Grey, op.cit., p.187.
4. Air 9/5, Minute 23, 16 March 1922.
5. Cab 23/29, Cabinet Meeting 18(22), 15 March 1922.

an examination was at least as important and certainly more immediate, if only because the Army was more likely than the Navy to be engaged in a campaign overseas in the near future. The Secretary of State felt, however, that it would be wise to accept the Balfour findings for the present.[1]

The Army Council did not have long to wait before circumstances favoured a fresh attack upon the Air Ministry. The fall of Lloyd George's Coalition Government towards the end of the year and the return of a Conservative Government bent on still greater economy was to provide the WO with ample opportunity for renewed attacks upon a Service whose future, whilst more settled, was by no means assured. Bonar Law fought and won the election on the theme of tranquillity. Events were to prove that it was not a term which could be in any way applied to the interservice relations during his period of office or that of his successor.

The Cabinet's decision to retain a separate Air Ministry was influenced, as Chamberlain implied, by a desire to put the Air Force scheme into operation in Mesopotamia. The inauguration of this scheme was planned for October and much saving in cost was anticipated. A further factor influencing government policy at that time was the growing air menace from France. At the very same cabinet meeting at which the Balfour recommendations had been accepted, a vast new programme in French long range bombers had been brought to the notice of Ministers.[2]

It was upon these very two factors - the ability to police imperial possessions as efficiently but more cheaply than the Army, and the unique ability to defend the nation from aerial attack by means of a retaliatory strike force - that the continuation of a separate Air Ministry and Air Force was to depend. Having warded off for the time being, at least, persistent attacks by the senior Services, the Air Ministry had now to prove that the separate existence so hardly won was justified in both spheres. In attempting to do so, they were once more to come up against sustained opposition from the WO.

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1. WO 163/28, Army Council 303rd Meeting, 30 May 1922. Cavan was appointed CIGS on 19 February 1922.
2. Cab 23/29, Cabinet Meeting 18(22), 15 March 1922.

PART I

THE SURVIVAL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, 1918-1926

Chapter 2

Air Force Claims to Substitution: Somaliland and Mesopotamia August 1919 - October 1922

From a military point of view, justification for the introduction of air control in Mesopotamia was based largely upon the alleged success of air operations in Somaliland in the early part of 1920. "Alleged", because the success of that campaign, in which a flight of aircraft and a small number of ground troops effectively destroyed the power of the Mad Mullah, was itself a matter of bitter controversy between the two services as to the merits of their respective contributions.

When the experiment was proposed in late 1919 at the instigation of Sir Geoffrey Archer, the then Governor of British Somaliland, the Army opposed the scheme. Indeed, from the start of the crisis the WO showed a marked reluctance to become involved in yet another imperial venture. At a meeting held at the Colonial Office in August, the WO, with bitter memories of past campaigns in this Protectorate, saw the situation in traditional terms - the sending of a large expeditionary force. Based on an on-the-spot report by Major General Sir Reginald Hoskins, the General Staff representative, Colonel Nugent, urged that action be postponed until the manpower and shipping situation was less acute.[1] Shortages there certainly were. Of this period Churchill was later to write:

> It was very strange to watch the vast shrinkage of our military power, while at the same time the increase of danger and hostility in almost every quarter could be so plainly discerned.[2]

For the General Staff, the overriding concern was that the air control scheme, virtually untested, would fail and that the Army, desperately short of fighting units though they were, would be called upon to carry out a rescue operation in extremely unfavourable circumstances. Wilson told Trenchard at this time, "I shall be asked when it's too late to rescue your aeroplanes and clear up the mess. That will mean not the two or three divisions I want now, but perhaps double the number - and a lot of

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1. Air 9/12, Air Control, 1920-1933, Folio 4.
2. Churchill, op.cit., p.371.

unnecessary alarm and expense."[1] However, when assurance was given that no such rescue operation would be called for, the CIGS was quite prepared to let the RAF do their worst. He wrote in his diary early in December 1919:

> This morning Winston, Trenchard, Amery and I had a meeting about the coming campaign in Somaliland to be conducted by the CO and by the Air Ministry. I had put in a strong objection but this afternoon both Amery and Trenchard said that under no conceivable circumstances would they ask me for any troops. I withdrew my objections and gave my blessing.[2]

Following the success of the operations, the Air Ministry naturally made extensive use of the part played by the air to further their case for substitution. They laid particular stress upon the moral effect of the new arm, claiming that air attacks on the Mullah's hutments and stock in the Medisha area on the 21st, 22nd and 23rd January had forced the Mullah out of his northern strongholds of Medisha and Jid Ali and into the waiting hands of the ground troops.[3] In his account of the operations dated 26th February, the RAF Commander, Group Captain R. Gordon, emphasised the utter demoralisation caused by the suddenness of the air attack, claiming that Medisha and Jid Ali had been abandoned almost immediately after the aerial attacks, whilst Baran Fort, a much weaker fortress, had only fallen to the King's African Rifles when surrounded and heavily bombarded, and not until the last defender had been killed.[4] An editorial in *The Aeroplane* went further. Such a victory, it claimed, anticipated the "degradation of the infantryman from being the first line of attack to the position of a mere 'mopper up'".[5] The magazine *Flight* was similarly impressed, regarding the operation as

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1. Boyle, op.cit., p.367. L.S.Amery was Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies 1919-21.
2. Wilson Diary, 2 December 1919.
3. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XVIII, 25 February 1920, p.399, speaks of a small mixed force being "only there to clear up the mess made by the RAF".
4. Hollinghurst Papers, AC 73/23/30, 26 February 1920.
5. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XVIII, 25 February 1920, p.400.

"the first decisive war in the air".[1]

Those at ground level, however, took a very different point of view. In a report dated 30th March, the Commander of the Somali Field Force, Colonel H.L. Ismay, complained that the Air Ministry seriously restricted the movement of his forces in the opening stages of the campaign and that, as a result, his most advanced troops were 70 miles from the main Dervish force on the first day of the aerial bombardment. As a consequence, not only were they too distant to take the best advantage of the results of the aerial attack, but they were also unable to benefit from close observation and reconnaissance of the situation which then developed. Whilst paying glowing tribute to the work of the RAF and the assistance they rendered, the report argued that, once the Army was given permission to advance, the close vicinity of the troops on the ground was the immediate cause of the Dervishes' break out towards the south. Ismay wrote:

> I consider that combined operations from the start would have given me a far better opportunity of taking the best advantage of the results achieved by the RAF.

Furthermore, the report claimed that the Dervishes had been constantly weakening over a long period. Since the winter of 1914-15, when the Mullah had lost control of the Hunao district, many of his men had been lost in small skirmishes with other tribes, in battles with the security forces, and by a steady drain of desertion. A decrease in ammunition supply had also very materially contributed towards the weakening of his fighting power. Ismay concluded:

> I consider therefore that the operations of the past six years, though of necessity of a strategic defensive character, have played an important and unostentatious part in the collapse of the Dervish power ... which has been completed in the operations just concluded.[2]

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1. *Flight Magazine*, Editorial, Vol.XII, 26 February 1920, p.226.
2. Ismay Papers, III/1/77/2, 30 March 1920.

In his contemporary account of the operations, the Secretary of Somaliland, Mr. Douglas Jardine, also gave more prominence to the part played by ground forces, citing in particular the march of the Camel Corps in pursuit of the Mullah from Jid Ali to the southern border of the Protectorate. He substantiated Ismay's arguments, too, by claiming that it was no exaggeration to say that since 1913 the Mullah had lost five-sixths of his following in action, by desertion, or at the hands of the executioner.[1] The importance of the pursuit by the Camel Corps was also stressed by Lord Rawlinson. Commenting on the Salmond Report, he claimed that if it had not been for this pursuit a decisive conclusion to the operations could not have been reached.[2] Likewise Major General Walter Kirke, the DCGS in India, writing on a proposal for air control on the North West Frontier in 1926, maintained that the campaign in Somaliland was in no sense an "independent air operation". In fact, aircraft were used according to the normal ideas of cooperation with ground troops.[3]

Further support for the Army's contribution was voiced in 1930 when, in response to a speech by Lord Trenchard in the House of Lords, a letter to *The Times* took the former CAS to task for giving the impression that the final destruction of the Mullah was due to the RAF alone. The writer, C.M. French, argued that the operations of early 1920 were but the last phase in six years of "constant, tireless reconnaissance and patient examination of prisoners and deserters". The bombing doubtless alarmed and demoralised the Mullah and his followers, but did them no serious damage. The letter continued:

> The final blow was struck by the Camel Corps in the course of their magnificent pursuit, during which the enemy was completely scattered and many of the principal fighting men captured, while the Mullah himself was driven out of the territory without followers and

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1. Ismay Papers, III/1/78, July 1920.
2. Air 9/27, Section 2, Memo by Lord Rawlinson on Sir John Salmond's Report, Undated.
3. Air 5/413, para.24a, 16 May 1926.

with a ruined presige.[1]

But of the two services in the dispute, the Air Force case received official recognition. Sir Geoffrey Archer, who had himself urged that aircraft should be used, reported that the credit was "primarily due to the RAF who were the main instrument of attack and the decisive factor".[2] The Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill, told the House of Commons that the RAF had achieved more than his department had been able to achieve in one expedition before the war at an expense that would have been six or seven million pounds in current money terms.[3] It is clear that the impression made upon Churchill by this action, plus the enormous cost of the Army's campaign in Mesopotamia during that same year, contributed greatly to his support of air control as a means of policing certain parts of the Empire.[4] Indeed, the operation was hardly over before he was instructing the CAS to prepare a plan for the air control of Mesopotamia which would provide for the maintenance of internal security.[5]

Such weighty support notwithstanding, the Army could rightly argue that the limited operations in Somaliland had in no way provided sufficient evidence to justify the adoption of such a

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1. Ismay Papers, III/1/85, *The Times*, 16 April 1930. Attempts to obtain further information concerning the identity of C.M.French proved unsuccessful. The greatest airing of the controversy came in 1962, however, with the publication of Boyle's biography of Lord Trenchard. Boyle's account of the Somaliland campaign in 1920, giving as it did the entire credit of the operation to the work of the RAF, prompted strong protest from Lord Ismay, among others. In a letter to Sir Colin Coote of *The Daily Telegraph* (9 April 1962) he claimed that the operation had been "somewhat of a hoax on the part of the Air Ministry..". See Ismay Papers, III/1/89/1, and letters to *The Daily Telegraph*, 13, 24 and 27 April, and 14 May 1962.
2. Supplement to *The London Gazette*, 1 November 1920.
3. Liddell Hart Papers, 10/1930/99, Article by Liddell Hart entitled "Air Control in Practice", 23 May 1930.
4. In 1920/21 nearly £30 million was spent on military expeditions in Mesopotamia, and a further £20 million for the current year. See Gilbert, op.cit., p.516.
5. Air 20/526, p.38, Churchill to CAS, 29 February 1920.

scheme in the much larger and more unsettled area of Mesopotamia. Nor, it could be pointed out, had air attack proved all that it had been cracked up to be. Of the six aircraft which had set off to attack Medisha at the opening of the campaign, one had been forced to land, four had failed to locate the target, and only one had completed the mission. The first bomb dropped did, in fact, singe the Mullah's clothing but, as Ismay later asserted, "to have deduced any lessons from such an amazing fluke would have been foolish".[1] Furthermore, the action in Somaliland, judged by any standards, had been a minor campaign and aroused such little public interest that, at the time, no concern was shown to enquire more fully into the facts. At the commencement of the troubles, Sir Geoffrey Archer had himself advised the Colonial Office that the Mullah's fortunes had reached such a low ebb that victory could be quickly won by sending two battalions of the King's African Rifles and a few aeroplanes to augment the local forces.[2] Amery too, speaking in the House of Commons in March 1920, had referred to the operation as being of "the very smallest size".[3]

It is against this background, then, that the Government's decision to introduce an air control scheme in Mesopotamia - and the Army's consequent opposition to such a scheme - must be seen and judged. It was not so much the military feasibility of the scheme as the cash savings it promised to bring, which commended itself to a Government bent on economy at almost any price.[4] The Cabinet, impressed with what Amery termed "the cheapest war in history",[5] was willing to snatch at any straw that appeared to offer some promise of saving. Thus it was that the very financial stringency which had decimated the RAF, reduced it to a skeleton of its war-time self, and threatened to destroy it

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1. *The Memoirs of Lord Ismay*, p.31.
2. Article by Sir Geoffrey Archer, *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 May 1962.
3. Ismay Papers, III/1/75, and *Hansard*, (HC5s), Vol.126, No.21, Cols.1212-1214.
4. A *Times* Editorial of 6 November 1920 deplored "the waste which still marks WO outlay at a time when the nation is financially embarrassed".
5. L.S.Amery, *My Political Life*, Vol.II, p.202.

altogether, was now to prove a major reason for its very salvation.

The basic idea behind the air scheme was to use the flexibility of the new arm to avoid the maintenance of widely scattered Army garrisons with their costly base organisations and highly vulnerable lines of communication. The RAF planned to concentrate their forces - made up of aircraft, armoured cars and a small number of imperial and local troops - into three base areas. From these areas the remote control of the vast territory would be exercised by the maintenance of auxiliary aerodromes throughout the country, a number of river gunboats, an efficient intelligence system, and the extensive use of wireless communication. In this way, it was argued, full use would be made of the inherent flexibility of airpower and, as the Editor of *Flight Magazine* explained, airpower would be seen for the first time in its "proper perspective".[1] In addition to substantial saving in cost, the scheme would prove the value of the RAF in substitution for the other fighting services.

To the WO, this scheme on the cheap was little short of courting disaster. Wilson wrote in his diary at the beginning of May:

> ... Winston, regardless of safety and hoping that any disaster may come after he has left office, is trying to gain credit and make a name by saving money. He certainly won't do so with my approval nor without a clear definition from the Cabinet of those who must bear the responsibility.[2]

Four days later, in a memo to the Cabinet, the General Staff pointed out that there was a real danger that the Government's policy in the Middle East would "outrun our military resources". Two courses were open to it. It could retain existing garrisons, make units up to strength and take on further responsibilities in

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1. *Flight Magazine*, Editorial, Vol.XII, 26 February 1920, p.228. For an outline of the preliminary scheme see Air Staff Paper of 12 March 1920, Item 15, Cab 1/29.
2. Wilson Diary, 1 May 1920.

the area or, alternatively, it could reduce the areas for which the Government was responsible and thus allow a gradual reduction in the strength of the garrisons.[1]

Later that month Lt.General Sir Aylmer Haldane, C-in-C Mesopotamia, came out strongly against the air scheme. In a letter to the WO, he claimed that the Air Ministry did not fully understand the political conditions pertaining in Mesopotamia. To withdraw political officers from their present posts and to substitute frequent, even daily visits by these officers in aeroplanes would be a "retrograde step". On the military aspect, he considered that a considerable time would have to elapse before local levies could be sufficiently trained to replace regular detachments. If the scheme were to be adopted, then he proposed an addition of three Indian battalions, one cavalry regiment, and twelve tanks to ensure that isolated posts were adequately defended. Nor did he consider that aeroplanes and armoured cars would be of sufficient value in broken country such as existed on the banks of the Euphrates. For operations in such terrain a mounted force was necessary. There was a real danger too, he maintained, that once the scheme had been introduced the civil government would pay less attention to road construction. In view of the possibility of external aggression - which did not come within the scope of the air control - roads might prove of vital importance for future military operations.[2]

This letter, a copy of which was sent to AVM Sir Geoffrey Salmond, AOC Middle East Area, was followed up the next month by a General Staff memo to the Cabinet advocating a withdrawal on all fronts to within areas covered by existing railheads. It was felt that, from a military point of view, such action would not greatly affect the situation strategically. There would be a central striking force with outposts at the head of the main communications in the occupied territory.[3]

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1. Trenchard Papers, CII/8, Memo by CIGS, 5 May 1920.
2. Air 20/526, Haldane to WO, 28 May 1920. References to Haldane throughout this work refer to Sir Aylmer Haldane.
3. Cab 24/107, CP 1469, 12 June 1920.

Such proposals were immediately countered by the CAS. The Air Force scheme, he stated, did not propose to undertake punitive expeditions other than with light armoured cars, batteries and aircraft. It was based on an entirely different conception in which large numbers of ground forces were not required. One either took the risk that the proposed scheme entailed, or one continued to pay to hold the country by force of arms with a large garrison with probably no more chance of success in maintaining peace than with the much larger garrison there at present.[1]

In November came stronger criticism of the ideas embodied in the air control scheme. In a note to the WO, Haldane pointed out that for bombing and observation purposes aircraft would have to fly at low altitudes and that in hilly country this would be "undesirable and may be disastrous". Aircraft as an auxiliary to troops on the ground were of great value, but as a primary force they did not have the qualities which would enable them to bring into subjection tribes who were in revolt.[2] Haldane reiterated these views in a letter to Wilson the following month, and added:

> I am as anxious as anyone can be to reduce the force here. No one could want to pass a long time in this country. But until Arab troops are raised and are efficient and even then they may not keep out an invader, I see no prospect of any reductions here.

In support of this opinion, Haldane enclosed a memo from Major General G.A.T. Sanders, commanding 17th Division. Referring to the recent widespread insurrection throughout the country, the General claimed that it was the successive defeats and heavy losses inflicted on the insurgent forces by ground troops which caused the rapid surrender in October and November. Aeroplanes by themselves would never have accomplished that task even if they had been employed in greater numbers than was the case. He wrote:

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1. Cab 24/107, CAS to Cabinet in reply to CP 1469. In July 1920 the strength of the British garrison was over 120,000 men, of whom 60,000 were combatants. See Thomson, op.cit., p.76.
2. Air 8/34, Haldane to WO, 25 November 1920.

> I have nothing but admiration and thanks for the excellent and devoted service rendered by the RAF throughout our present arduous operations. But I desire to emphasise that this insurrection extending over so large an area, could never have been crushed except by the employment of our troops in strength, and that by themselves the RAF could not have achieved this result.[1]

The General Staff's attitude to the situation in Mesopotamia must be seen in the light of the larger policy of imperial retrenchment. Wilson's view, as expressed in a letter to Haldane at this time, was that the territories of Constantinople, Palestine, all of Persia and the greater part of Mesopotamia were "ridiculous extravagances"; the nation did not have the money and the Army did not have the men for such commitments. With the state of the world as it was - with troubles in Poland, Germany, Russia and Ireland - the best policy was to withdraw as quickly as possible from any area that cost money and which was not absolutely vital to the safety of the Empire.[2] In the New Year he wrote again to Haldane. "You and I," he warned, "have to look primarily to the safety of our own men and we cannot therefore unduly gamble on the sufficiency and efficiency of the Arab force raised in the scrabling (*sic*) and hasty manner ... I cannot believe that Arab levies raised between now and the next hot weather will be worth anything from the military point of view and a bad check or a military disaster would be infinitely more expensive in the end than a little over insurance."[3] A few days later Haldane wrote to Churchill, the Colonial Secretary designate, to inform him that if chaos were to be avoided there could be no reduction in his forces.[4]

It is clear by this stage, however, that Churchill had rejected a military occupation on the grand scale. He favoured

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1. Wilson Papers, 55/7, Haldane to Wilson, 15 December 1920.
2. Ibid., letter Wilson to Haldane, 28 December 1920, enclosed in letter Wilson to Congreve, Folio 6.
3. Ibid., 55/6, Wilson to Haldane, 7 January 1921.
4. Gilbert, op.cit., p.514, letter dated 13 January 1921.

either a withdrawal to Basra or the introduction of the air scheme. Early in January he sent a telegram to the High Commissioner in Mesopotamia, Sir Percy Cox, warning him that unless the country could be governed more cheaply, "retirement and contraction to the coastal zone" was inevitable.[1] The following week he informed Cox that the country was furious at the present rate of expenditure, "no part of which was more assailed than money spent in Mesopotamia".[2]

Meanwhile Trenchard, sensing that the economic climate was set in his favour, anticipated the best and sent out Group Captain A.E. Borton. Via him he sent a hurried note to AVM Sir Geoffrey Salmond, AOC Middle East, to inform him that whatever might be in the wind was "changing daily, almost hourly". Borton, he instructed, was to be sent on to Mesopotamia "by the quickest possible means".[3]

At the same time, Wilson pressed on with his efforts to abort the scheme. Churchill, he told Lt.General Sir Walter Congreve in a letter, was guaranteed to box up the whole situation quicker than any "frock" he knew. The air scheme was not viable, and occupation by the Army would involve almost a division and a half at a cost of eight to ten million pounds a year. It was best to withdraw to the railheads from where the oil resources at Ahwaz could be protected.[4] Three days later, according to his diary, he was told by Churchill that the military force had to be reduced and withdrawn to Basra.[5] Wilson was delighted and wrote to Haldane the following day:

> I had a long talk with Winston last night. .. and I think he is gradually coming to realise that he cannot hold Mesopotamia

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1. Gilbert, op.cit., p.510, wire dated 8 January 1921.
2. Ibid., p.516.
3. Trenchard Papers, II/27/144, Trenchard to Sir Geoffrey Salmond, 5 January 1921. Borton, then on the permanent staff at Halton, was appointed AOC Mesopotamian Group the next day.
4. Wilson Papers, Wilson to Congreve, Folio 7, 20 January 1921. Congreve was then GOC Egypt and Palestine.
5. Wilson Diary, 23 January 1921.

> with aeroplanes and a few odd garrisons dotted about.[1]

This constant opposition on the part of the WO also had an effect on Trenchard. Vitally aware though he was of the importance of the scheme to the Air Ministry at this stage, he also began to waver. "I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that the scheme is unworkable," he wrote to his Secretary of State at the beginning of February, "for reasons that a) it is entirely dependent on the wholehearted cooperation of the military, which I feel convinced is quite out of the question at present; and b) this area is very badly situated strategically and until our relations with the Turks and Arabs have been put on a more satisfactory basis it will always be a source of anxiety." However, despite the "ill-advised criticism on insufficient data that has been put forward by various military officers lately", Trenchard wished to make it clear that the Air Staff still stood by the scheme they had produced.[2]

But Wilson's optimism was misplaced. In fact, Churchill was now convinced that air control was the answer, if only for reasons of economy. As Liddell Hart points out, he was anxious at this time to make a fresh mark in current political affairs and saw that his best chance lay in the postwar retrenchment of expenditure.[3] "I am determined to save you millions," he told the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Austen Chamberlain, on the 15th February.[4]

Within a few days of taking over the Colonial Office, Churchill had already planned a meeting at Cairo in March to discuss the whole question of control in the Middle East territories. Haldane had no illusions as to the true purpose of

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1. Wilson Papers, 55/8, Wilson to Haldane, 24 January 1921.
2. Trenchard Papers, CII/8, CAS to Secretary of State for Air, 5 February 1921.
3. Liddell Hart in *The Military Strategist*, (Churchill: Four Faces of the Man), p.180, quoted by James, op.cit., p.125.
4. Gilbert, op.cit., p.531. The previous day Churchill had been appointed Secretary of State for the Colonies.

the conference. On the 14th February he asked Wilson for "an inkling of Churchill's scheme" so that he might have a chance of reflecting upon it "before the pistol is put to my head".[1] Two days later the DCIGS informed the Air Ministry that the General Staff fully endorsed the conclusions arrived at by Haldane as to the inappropriateness of the Air Force scheme. They felt that the answer to the problem lay in close cooperation, not in an independent air command.[2] In reply, Trenchard circulated a note a few days later. The scheme was viable, he insisted, but it could only be proved to be so if it were given a try.[3] That same month a Cabinet committee under the chairmanship of the Duke of Devonshire set out the alternative schemes. The choice lay between a WO plan based on the existing method of occupation and costing some £20 million a year, and one by the Air Staff whereby control was exercised by the RAF at an estimated cost of £6 million a year.[4]

The Conference convened at Cairo on the 12th March 1921 studied both schemes, but the choice never appeared to be in doubt. The need, emphasised the Colonial Secretary in his opening remarks, was for coordination. There had to be an abandonment of all prejudices in an effort to effect economies.[5] Despite their strong objections to the Air Force scheme, it was a message which, to a large extent, the military members observed. Major General Sir Edmund Ironside, who attended the conference and was due to undertake the task of preparing Mesopotamia for the handover, recalls that Churchill put through his economies in a masterly way and "with hardly even mild protests on the part of the Army authorities".[6] But economy was not the only consideration. The Conference saw the air control scheme as a means of giving the Air Force experience in command and of testing

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1. Wilson Papers, 55/9, Haldane to Wilson, 14 February 1921.
2. Air 8/34, Lt.General Sir Philip Chetwode to CAS, 16 February 1921.
3. Ibid., Note by CAS, 18 February 1921.
4. R.Hannaford, *Iraq 1918-32: The Role of the RAF in the Maintenance of Peace*, p.10.
5. Air 8/37, Cairo Conference, March 1921.
6. W.E.Ironside, *High Road to Command*, p.195.

the potentiality of airpower in such conditions.[1] Despite such outward agreement, however, relations between the two services were strained both inside and outside the conference room. Trenchard later claimed that he had been ostracised by his military colleagues[2] and that, during the discussions, absolute horror had been expressed by the Generals at the dangerous gamble to be undertaken in the name of economy.[3]

As in the case of Somaliland, the greatest concern on the part of the Army was that the Air Force scheme would collapse, thus necessitating the despatch of an army to get the Air Ministry out of trouble. What dispute there was at the Conference, therefore, centred mainly around the disposition of forces under the air scheme. At the 5th meeting of the Combined Political and Military Committees, the military members expressed concern at the Air Staff's decision to station the main garrison at Baghdad. They favoured Amara. In the event of hostility within the country, they argued, this would obviate the guarding of 300 miles of communication. Furthermore, Amara was well placed to protect the oilfields and could be used as a base from which the Army in India could be more readily reinforced should the need arise.[4]

The CAS maintained that as some 1,800 men were to be stationed at Baghdad, he did not anticipate that it would be necessary to remove this force by air, it being large enough to hold out until relief arrived in the event of a general uprising. The DMO, however, Major General Sir Percy Radcliffe, felt sure that the CIGS would not agree to keep a military force in Baghdad which could not be removed by air and whose lines of communication were not guarded by troops.[5] At the fourth meeting of the Joint Political and Military Committee the following day, the matter was again discussed and the Committee eventually

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1. Air 8/37, 3rd Meeting of the Joint Political and Military Committee, Appendix 13, Annexure 1, para.11, 12 March 1921..
2. Boyle, op.cit., p.383.
3. Air 9/8, Notes on speech given 20 February 1925.
4. For sketch map of Mesopotamia see overleaf.
5. Air 8/37, Appendix 13, 17 March 1921.

Fig.1

recommended in favour of Amara for the location of the Imperial forces.[1] At earlier meetings, recommendations were also made concerning the retention in Mesopotamia of all armoured cars and personnel, and the need was recognised for the RAF to recruit and train sufficient armoured car personnel to take over when the scheme came into operation.[2]

As Ironside points out, as far as Mesopotamia was concerned,

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1. Air 8/37, Appendix 13, Annexure 3, 18 March 1921.
2. Ibid., Annexure 1, 12 March 1921.

the military were virtually faced with an ultimatum. Less than a month was given for the garrison to be reduced from 39 to 22 battalions, and this Haldane accepted without protest.[1] The final scheme envisaged a mixed brigade of British and Indian infantry, some native levies, four squadrons of armoured cars and eight RAF squadrons.[2] But until the scheme was adopted in principle by the Cabinet, both services continued to plead their case. Wilson remained ever hostile. He wrote to Congreve describing the scheme as "a fantastic salad of hot air, aeroplanes and Arabs".[3] General Lord Rawlinson was also opposed to the scheme but, faced with growing political unrest and the threat of trouble with Afghanistan, he at first welcomed the release of many Indian battalions from Mesopotamia to bring India's postwar army up to strength.[4] Less than a month later, however, he too was complaining bitterly to Wilson that the "hot air scheme" was bound to collapse and the Indian Army would be called to the rescue.[5] Like concern was voiced by the new Secretary of State for War over the prospect of having to send troops back into Mesopotamia. At a Conference of Ministers held in April, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans expressed anxiety lest the proposed desert air route between Egypt and Mesopotamia - an integral part of the air control scheme - might involve a serious risk of new military commitments.[6]

Trenchard, in the meantime, was anxious that the scheme should not only succeed but be seen to succeed. "What I want is the education of Borton and the people in Mesopotamia in working on the lines I indicate," he wrote to AVM Sir Geoffrey Salmond.

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1. Ironside, op.cit., p.189.
2. The eight squadrons were composed of four single-engined two-seater squadrons, one squadron of Sopwith Snipes, one reconnaissance squadron of Bristol Fighters, and two squadrons of Vickers Vimy bombers to be converted as troop carriers. See Hannaford, op.cit., p.11.
3. Wilson Papers, Wilson to Congreve, Folio 8, 1 April 1921.
4. Ibid., 13d/16, Rawlinson to Wilson, 27 April 1921.
5. Ibid., 13d/23, Rawlinson to Wilson, 25 May 1921.
6. Gilbert, op.cit., p.577.

If the scheme proved sound then the RAF would expand; if it failed then the Air Force would go through "very parlous times".[1] That there was risk involved the Air Staff were prepared to admit. Their fortunes were at such a low ebb, that in attempting the scheme they had nothing to lose but the chains which bound them tactically to the two older services. The Army, on the other hand, responsible as they were for the external defence of the Mandate, and only too aware of the Turkish menace from the north, were not prepared to take what they considered to be undue chances.

In June, welcome support for the scheme came from a most unexpected quarter. Haldane, who had always been a severe critic, now began to have second thoughts. In a letter to Wilson he admitted that aeroplanes were doing better than he had anticipated. He was determined, he said, to give them a fair trial in order to show Trenchard that he was not in the slightest degree prejudiced.[2] The following week he wrote to Churchill in less guarded terms, suggesting that had he had sufficient aircraft during the previous year, he might have prevented the insurrection from spreading beyond the first incident.[3] In a letter the following month he went further. He suggested that more British troops were not necessary in the proposed air control scheme. Aeroplanes, he claimed, were feared by the local population and, in any case, Mesopotamia was not a "white man's country".[4]

For the Air Ministry, alive to the gamble they were taking, Haldane's "conversion" was most timely and was put to good effect in the propaganda war then being waged over the merits and demerits of air control. Some of Haldane's military colleagues were not so convinced that he had seen the true light, however. Lt. General Sir Walter Braithwaite, GOC-in-C Western Command,

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1. Trenchard Papers, II/27/144/2, Trenchard to Sir Geoffrey Salmond, 20 May 1921.
2. Wilson Papers, 55/18, Haldane to Wilson, 19 June 1921.
3. Trenchard Papers, CII/8, Haldane to Churchill, 25 June 1921.
4. Gilbert, op.cit., p.801, letter dated 12 July 1921.

India, writing to Major General Montgomery-Massingberd some time later, referred to ulterior motives. He wrote:

> ... we who know Master Haldane know very well he would say just what Winston and Co wanted him to say on this particular subject at that particular time... I personally am pretty sure that Haldane wasn't going to risk not getting his GCMG by opposing Winston or by making a statement throwing doubt on the capacity of Winston's pet scheme to materialise. That is a rather beastly thing for me to say of Haldane, I admit, but I never have trusted him and never shall.[1]

At the beginning of July Wilson wrote to Haldane agreeing that the WO had pledged themselves to put no obstacles in the way of reasonable preparations by the RAF, and stating that they would approach the take-over in a spirit of "give and take".[2] A few days later, however, after a long talk with Major General Sir Edmund Ironside, Wilson's attitude appeared to harden once more. Ironside, he was pleased to discover, was strongly opposed to air control. RAF officers, he had argued, were little more than chauffeurs and it would be quite impossible to put soldiers under their command. Furthermore, matters would become even worse when so-called officers who had never been brought up either as soldiers or sailors came to positions of authority within the Air Force. Wilson had also been taken with Ironside's argument concerning the employment of bombing as a means of control. The General felt sure that Arabs who had been bombed would threaten to withdraw their allegiance to the new King Feisal and thus he would have to insist that no villages be bombed. As a consequence, the whole scheme would fall to the ground. In relating this

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1. Montgomery-Massingberd Papers, 153, Braithwaite to Montgomery-Massingberd, 14 July 1922. But the Air Force was not without its defectors. A note at this time by the DOI, Air Commodore J.M.Steel, maintained that the Air Ministry should not raise and maintain its own ground troops. The Air Force, he argued, would be judged by its work in the air, not on the ground. See Air 8/34, Note dated 28 July 1921.
2. Wilson Papers, 55/17, Wilson to Haldane, 1 July 1921.

conversation to Rawlinson in a letter the following day, Wilson said that he was pleased to find that "Tiny", an eminently practical, hard-headed soldier, was so clearly of the same opinion as the General Staff on this matter.[1] In fact, Ironside had already made his views plain to Sir Geoffrey Salmond during frank discussions at the Cairo Conference. "At first sight," he wrote later, "the RAF scheme seemed almost childish, and I could not imagine that any such plan could have been conceived by an officer who had been educated at "the shop"."[2]

The end of July saw the beginning of a long and involved wrangle over the transfer arrangements between the two services. The major disputes centred around the employment of armoured cars and the general question of troop disposition, but the viability of the air control scheme as a whole was also called into question again.

On the 23rd July, in reply to an Air Ministry enquiry concerning armoured cars and the part the General Staff were willing to play in their provision, the WO replied that they had learnt from Haldane that armoured cars were not suitable for the open country in Mesopotamia. The possibility of providing more suitable vehicles was therefore being considered. In the meantime, the WO advised that the present armoured car companies might be removed at any time for service in Ireland.[3] Trenchard saw this as pure obstruction. Referring to this "vexed question of armoured cars" in a letter to Borton a few days later, he hinted secretly at the possibility of manning the cars with RAF personnel - though this had in fact been openly suggested at the Cairo Conference.[4] The point raised by Wilson, however, appears to be genuine enough, though there seems to have been some dragging of feet on the part of the WO. Haldane in a letter to Wilson two months earlier had indeed suggested that the air scheme might be better served by some kind of light tank. He had advised that the

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1. Wilson Papers, 13e/1, Wilson to Rawlinson, 12 July 1921.
2. Ironside, op.cit., pp.192-3.
3. Trenchard Papers, CII/8, WO to Air Council, 23 July 1921.
4. Ibid., II/27/20, Trenchard to Borton, 28 July 1921.

armoured cars then employed had too heavy a body for the chassis and that the pneumatic tyres were very vulnerable.[1] Prompted by the letter from the Air Ministry, Wilson wrote to Haldane at the beginning of August, complaining about the shortage of armoured cars and suggesting that those in Mesopotamia should be used elsewhere and replaced by new companies of light tanks as soon as possible.[2]

On the 4th August the area of dispute was widened. On that date a memo written by Churchill for the Cabinet took the WO to task for clinging onto the idea of a 12 battalion garrison at a cost of £10 million a year. This, he calculated, worked out at something like £1,000 for every infantry soldier, regardless of colour. This was a force more fitted to face a German army and was far too costly for a "poor, starving, backward, bankrupt country like Mesopotamia". If this sort of military weight were required then it would be better to give up the mandate at once. What was needed was the "cheap, makeshift machinery" which his Office had successfully employed in East and West Africa. He admitted that such a scheme would involve some measure of risk, but it would be introduced - and this is to be noted - "without prejudice to the over-riding and persistent right and duty of the WO and General Staff to prevent their troops being placed in a position which they consider unduly dangerous or under conditions detrimental to their health or efficiency".[3]

Wilson did not share Churchill's optimism. It would be only a matter of time, he told Haldane, before there would be a wave of indignation against the bombing methods being employed by the Air Force, and this would knock the bottom out of the scheme.[4]

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1. Wilson Papers, 55/16, Haldane to Wilson, 9 May 1921. Borton had also written to Trenchard earlier on this matter, informing him that "the movement of armoured cars is very severely handicapped in this country ..". See Trenchard Papers, II/27/20, 1 July 1921.
2. Wilson Papers, 55/20, Wilson to Haldane, 8 August 1921.
3. Trenchard Papers, CII/8, Memo by Secretary of State for the Colonies (CP 3197), 4 August 1921.
4. Wilson Papers, 55/20, Wilson to Haldane, 8 August 1921.

In a letter to Congreve a week later, he clearly summed up in one paragraph his own views on the international situation. Of the Government he wrote:

> They have offered to come out of Ireland, they have agreed to come out of Egypt, and they are going to be kicked out of India. On the other hand, they cling on to Silesia, they cling on to Constantinople, they hold on like the devil to Palestine, and like grim death they clutch to Mesopotamia. Is there .. anything more amazing?[1]

The following day the WO took their grievance to the Cabinet. In a long, hard-hitting memo, the Secretary of State for War questioned the basic reasoning behind the air control scheme. If economy were the paramount need, he asked, why were the RAF to be allowed to set up their own army and navy in the shape of armoured cars and gunboats, not to mention a host of auxiliary services? His Department was being asked to supply personnel to train airmen in tasks which they could well do themselves in an Army framework. The Arab levies were by no means up to standard and all the RAF could rely upon was the bombing of women and children. The proposed military forces, on the other hand, were intended to keep order and gradually to reconcile hostile tribes to a civilised rule. Nor could the comparison with colonial rule in Africa be accepted. The troops in East and West Africa were raised by local authorities and there were no white troops involved. The scheme under discussion would remove all Army jurisdiction over the garrison yet, at the same time, the WO would still be responsible for the defence of the country from outside aggression.

But what perturbed the Army Council most, complained the War Minister, was the fact that, under the scheme, it was proposed to evacuate the imperial forces in the event of a general uprising. This would leave the local levies to their fate, a policy hardly conducive to the instilling of loyalty among their rank and file. He continued:

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1. Wilson Papers, Wilson to Congreve, Folio 14, 16 August 1921.

> But leaving our friends in the lurch has not hitherto been a policy of the British government and I feel that we ought not to shut our eyes to the possibility that, when calamity arises, we may not be willing to put the policy into operation, and that we may therefore be called upon to send reinforcements to extricate our small beleaguered garrison.

The Secretary of State held that the estimates of cost put forward by the Air Ministry were illusory. It was undesirable and uneconomical to allow the Air Force to depart from its present function as an auxiliary force. Furthermore, the proposal to give the Colonial Office financial and executive control over troops of the British Army was unconstitutional and would lead to hopeless confusion.[1]

At a Cabinet meeting the following day the scheme was debated in full and all the arguments were given a fresh airing. The Air Force took particular offence at the War Minister's reference to the bombing of women and children, arguing, as they had before, that due warning was given of bombing and that it was only used to disrupt the daily life of the Arab until such time as he toed the line. As regards the use of armoured cars, the Air Ministry maintained that they would not have had to contemplate the maintenance of these vehicles if they had not had good reason to fear a policy of consistent obstruction on the part of the Army. In the event, money spoke louder than any words uttered by the WO. Whilst appreciating that some risk was involved, the Cabinet came down in favour of the Air Force scheme.[2] To do otherwise, noted an observer at the time, would have reduced the Government's Anti-Waste Campaign to nothing more than "Lloyd Georgian window dressing".[3]

Worthington-Evans agreed that he would loyally carry out the Cabinet's decision and that, in particular, he would be reasonable in interpreting the provision concerning the WO's

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1. Air 19/109, Memo by Secretary of State for War (CP 3240), 17 August 1921.
2. Cab 23/26, Cabinet Meeting 70(21), 18 August 1921.
3. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XXI, 10 August 1921, p.118.

right and duty to ensure the safety of their troops.[1]

Pronouncements of loyalty aside, however, the WO took the Cabinet ruling with little good grace. A letter from Captain T.B. Marson, Trenchard's Private Secretary, to Air Commodore P.W. Game a few days later reads:

> ... the WO are taking it badly and are very bitter about it, and will do everything in their power to render impossible any sort of cooperation with them. It seems a great pity but I suppose we are up against vested interests and shall have to fight accordingly.

In the same letter, however, Marson pointed out that, according to Air Commodore H.R.M. Brooke-Popham, Haldane had now become completely convinced of the ability of the Air Force to deal with any situation that was likely to arise in Mesopotamia.[2]

Later that month - though it hardly seemed necessary - the WO sent a letter to the Colonial Office stating that the Army Council viewed with "profound misgivings" the future of the regular troops that were to be retained in Mesopotamia under the proposed conditions. On receipt of the letter, a member of the Colonial Office staff jotted in the margin: "profound misgiving is a bad spirit in which to commence a policy of loyal cooperation."[3] The next month Churchill wrote to Trenchard:

> You require to watch very carefully what the WO do, as they are very sore over recent decisions and are not likely to be very helpful to us.[4]

With such feelings of mistrust abroad, it is not surprising that the dispute over the provision of armoured cars should again be raised. The Air Ministry, convinced that a WO decision to send two of the armoured car companies to India was but a subtle means

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1. Cab 23/26, Cabinet Meeting 70(21), 18 August 1921.
2. Trenchard Papers, II/27/71/1, Marson to Game, 22 August 1921. Game was then Director of Training and Organisation, and Brooke-Popham was Commandant, RAF Staff College.
3. CO 730/13, WO to Colonial Office, 25 August 1921.
4. Trenchard Papers, CII/8, Churchill to CAS, 10 September 1921.

of avoiding their obligation, wrote to the WO on two occasions early in September to remind them of their undertaking.[1] Despite assurances from the WO, the Air Council were not convinced. Trenchard began to prepare a scheme whereby he could provide his own cars and train the necessary crews just in case the WO "left us in the lurch".[2] At the same time, he badgered the Colonial Office to have the matter clarified. This the Colonial Office did and towards the end of September received what they considered to be a firm undertaking on the part of the WO to supply three companies of armoured cars or light tanks by the inception of the RAF scheme on the 1st October 1922.[3] The Air Ministry was informed by letter on the 13th October.[4] A similar pledge was made direct to Churchill two months later. A request that three armoured car companies be sent direct from Ireland to Mesopotamia was bluntly refused, but Wilson assured the Colonial Secretary that they would be in the Mandate before the next hot weather.[5]

By this time, however, a more authentic threat to the Air Force scheme was materialising. In August Wilson had informed the Colonial Office that, because of the risks involved, he was opposed to having regular troops stationed in Mesopotamia when the Air Force scheme was introduced.[6] The following month a warning also came from Baghdad. The High Commissioner, Sir Percy Cox, in a telegram to the Colonial Office, expressed concern over the possibility of Turkish hostility from the north. The scheme adopted at Cairo, he pointed out, had been based on the hypothesis of a friendly Turkey. He wished to emphasise that point so that "in our keen desire to effect economy and to reduce our force we may not close our eyes to the fact that our calculations may be vitiated by external situation".[7]

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1. Air 5/476, 37b, DOI to DMO, 5 September 1921, and 37a, Air Council to WO, 7 September 1921.
2. Ibid., Minutes of Conference between Air Ministry and Colonial Office, 15 September 1921.
3. CO 730/13, WO to Colonial Office, 24 September 1921.
4. Ibid., CO to Air Ministry, 13 October 1921.
5. Wilson Diary, 9 December 1921.
6. Air 5/476, Item 39, WO to Colonial Office, 24 August 1921.
7. Ibid., 64a, High Commissioner, Mesopotamia, to Secretary of State for Colonies, 24 September 1921.

Three days later, Rawlinson, writing to Wilson, made it plain that if he (Wilson) were not willing to put British battalions at risk, neither was he willing to put Indian troops in danger.[1] The CIGS noted in his diary the following day that Churchill was frightened about the Turks attacking from the north and now realised that his "miserable policy is going to pot".[2] By early October, Wilson was telling Rawlinson that he was rapidly losing all interest in Mesopotamia. He could not understand a plan which put King Feisal in power, supported him with hot air, aeroplanes and Arabs, and, at the same time, quarrelled like hell with the Turks in every other theatre. The letter concluded:

> Nor can Winston call on me any longer to pull him out of a mess, nor can he call on you and so having got into a mess whenever that day comes, he can only hop into an aeroplane and fly away shouting tata to any poor bloody native who is stupid enough to back us.[3]

In fact, the dangers envisaged by the WO and HQ India were fully appreciated by the Colonial Office. Churchill admitted in a telegram to Cox in mid-November that, in the event of an invasion, the forces available might not be able to cope successfully. His Department was fully alive to the risks involved.[4] As Wilson later put it, Churchill was "between a cheap and fatal tenure .. and a real occupation with security and peace which he can't pay for".[5] Only a few days earlier, however, at a conference at which the War, Colonial and Foreign Offices were represented, the Air Ministry had contended that when full air control had been assumed, invasion could be delayed, if not repelled.[6]

This Turkish threat - at its most acute during the next three

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1. Wilson Papers, 13f/1, Rawlinson to Wilson, 27 September 1921.
2. Wilson Diary, 28 September 1921.
3. Wilson Papers, 13e/29, 5 October 1921.
4. Air 5/476, 84a, Secretary of State for the Colonies to High Commissioner, Mesopotamia, 14 November 1921.
5. Wilson Diary, 9 December 1921.
6. Air 5/476, 84a, Secretary of State for the Colonies to High Commissioner, Mesopotamia, refers.

months - now reopened the whole question of the proposed disposition of troops under the Air Force scheme. To the surface again came the dispute over the respective advantages and disadvantages of Baghdad and Amara as the HQ for the imperial troops. As early as July in a letter to Borton, Trenchard had complained that the site of Amara, as suggested by the Cairo Conference, was "unsound from every point of view". He considered, too, that General Haldane's optimism concerning the effectiveness of raised platforms on barges - thus making river travel more secure - greatly added to the Air Ministry's case.[1] By the middle of October, after work on new accommodation had been put in hand at Baghdad, Trenchard could write to Borton, "I do not anticipate any further serious opposition on the part of the WO to the stationing of troops at Baghdad instead of Amara and that General Haldane shares this view appears to be evinced by the continuation of the building programme ..."[2]

With the growing menace from the north, however, Trenchard's optimism proved to be misplaced. In a note to Wilson on the 16th December, the DMO, General Sir Percy Radcliffe, reminded his Chief that the Cairo Conference had explicitly laid down that the four battalions under the Air Force scheme would not be quartered at Baghdad, but at Basra or Amara. He did not suggest that it would be impossible for two British battalions with the aid of the Air Force to cut their way out of Baghdad and retire to Basra, but they could only do this if they received the order to move in time - and that was the crux of the matter. Knowing as he did the machinery of "Government", it would be optimistic to suppose a decision would be forthcoming until it was too late to extricate the troops.[3] Three days later, at a conference on Mesopotamia in the Colonial Office, the CIGS made it clear that he could not agree to leave two British battalions at Baghdad with no proper lines of communication and with no power of reinforcement.[4] He could only consent to this if extra Indian

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1. Trenchard Papers, II/27/20, 28 July 1921.
2. Ibid., Trenchard to Borton, 13 October 1921.
3. WO 32/5899, DMO to CIGS, 16 December 1921.
4. Wilson Diary, 19 December 1921.

or British troops were provided to secure the lines of communication along the Tigris.

Trenchard was not a little vexed. Such an idea was nonsense, he fumed in a letter to Churchill. If one were required to guarantee absolute safety in everything, then one might as well give up the Mandate. The General Staff, he complained, would take no responsibility themselves and would never agree to the Air Force scheme. He would not shirk the responsibility, however, and was willing and anxious to take the blame.[1] Early in the New Year the CIGS sent a letter on the same subject to his Minister, Worthington-Evans, in much the same tone but not the same tenor. He argued that if three battalions were to be stationed at Baghdad, then a total force of six battalions must be left in Mesopotamia in order that the lines of communication were adequately protected. Such numbers would certainly be necessary because from every point of view the situation had become worse over the past twelve months. In addition, since the discussion of these questions had begun, the Geddes Committee had recommended a reduction of 28 regular infantry battalions. If this reduction were to be enforced, he could not agree to any battalions being locked up in Mesopotamia. Apart from being of no use from the military point of view, they would be an added liability if troubles began.[2]

Alongside this dispute over the precise stationing of the imperial troops went a heated argument over the defence of Mosul in the extreme north. The scheme as presented at the Cairo Conference had not envisaged a permanent garrison at Mosul, but later in the year, in a letter to Borton, Trenchard hinted that local conditions might necessitate a temporary RAF occupation of Mosul and that this might "extend over a considerable period".[3] Early in the New Year, after the WO had decided to withdraw their forces from Mosul by the 31st March, Cox sent a telegram to the

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1. Trenchard Papers, CII/8, CAS to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 December 1921.
2. WO 32/5899, CIGS to Secretary of State for War, 9 January 1922.
3. Trenchard Papers, II/27/20, Trenchard to Borton, 13 October 1921.

Colonial Secretary strongly urging that between the date of the military withdrawal from Mosul and the introduction of the Air Force scheme, the existing facilities for air action in the area should in no way be reduced.[1] Two days before the despatch of this wire, however, Haldane had informed the WO that he was strongly opposed to such an idea,[2] and on the 14th January the WO warned the Air Council that they were "quite unable to agree to the retention of an isolated detachment (a squadron of aircraft and an armoured car company) at so great a distance from any means of support".[3]

The crisis over Mosul at this time also provided Colonel J.F.C. Fuller with an opportunity to criticise the policy of air control. Writing in the *Army Quarterly*, he admitted that man could be controlled from the air if one were prepared to follow the example of the doctor and the axe. By using drastic measures a troublesome knave in Mosul could be obliterated like Carthage, man, woman and child, but the British Empire was not built upon obliteration but upon pacification.[4]

On the 19th January the dispute over troop dispositions came to a dramatic head. At a meeting called by the WO to which Trenchard was personally invited, the Air Staff were informed by the Adjutant General that the Secretary of State for War had decided that he would allow no personnel or armoured car units to be retained in Mesopotamia once the Air Force scheme came into operation. The only exception to this ruling would be staff officers who agreed to be seconded and other ranks who might volunteer to be transferred to the RAF. By way of explanation, it was stated that the Secretary of State for War had taken this decision on account of the objections voiced by the General Staff concerning the insecurity of the Baghdad garrison.[5]

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1. Trenchard Papers, CII/8, Cox to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 12 January 1922.
2. Ibid., Haldane to WO, 10 January 1922.
3. Air 5/189, 4a, WO to Air Council, 14 January 1922. See also CO 730/32.
4. Article entitled "Problems of Mechanical Warfare", *Army Quarterly*, Vol.III, No.2, January 1922, p.295.
5. Trenchard Papers, CII/8, 19 January 1922.

The following day the WO informed the Colonial Office of their decision[1] and, at the same time, put in a lengthy memo to the Cabinet with the recommendation that the paper should be considered "before the Cabinet Committee deals in detail with the proposals for the reduction of the Army put forward by the Geddes Committee". It is clear that the WO were using the findings of the Geddes Committee to add support to their policy in Mesopotamia whilst, at the same time, using the situation in the Mandate to take some of the sting, if possible, out of the Committee's recommendations. In their memo, the General Staff claimed that the assertions of the Air Ministry with regard to air control were, in fact, just that; they remained to be proved. It had already been shown that for the normal police work of the Army abroad it was men that must be had in adequate numbers. As for tanks suitable for operations in a hot climate, it would probably take several years before a satisfactory type could be produced. The General Staff also took the Geddes Committee to task. The proposed reduction of cavalry forces - apparently influenced by the advent of the Air Force - was a mistake. Aircraft in their present state of development were only effective against an enemy presenting a tangible and extensive target, they could not replace cavalry in advanced or flank guard actions. The proposed cuts would "disastrously cripple the efficiency of the expeditionary force".[2]

A few days later, Trenchard wrote a strong protest note to Churchill. Arrangements between the Air Ministry and WO, he reported, had reached deadlock and reference to the Cabinet appeared inevitable. After giving a resumé of what had taken place at the meeting of the 19th, he complained that the WO had not lived up to the spirit or the letter of their undertakings to the Cabinet when the air scheme was approved. It had taken five months since then for the WO to discover the reasons on which they now based their uncompromising refusal. If this refusal did in fact hinge on the question of defending lines of

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1. Air 5/476, 85a, WO to Colonial Office, 20 January 1922.
2. Cab 24/132, CP 3619, 10 January 1922.

communication, then he would prefer to do without the battalions altogether. Any such arrangement would be a contradiction of the principle on which the scheme of air control was based. By withholding all cooperation from any undertaking which was not in accordance with their views, the General Staff were claiming the right to retain the Air Force in a "state of permanent tutelage". In support of his complaint, Trenchard pointed out that as late as the 16th January in a paper circulated to the Indian Requirements Committee, the CIGS had stated that the General Staff had accepted the Air Force proposals for the control of Mesopotamia. Trenchard complained, too, that from the beginning of negotiations between the two departments, involving both semi-official discussion and a number of conferences, the WO had shown a lack of cooperation. On the question of armoured cars, the loan of Army personnel to assist with auxiliary services, and the transfer of responsibility for works and services, neither the Air Ministry nor the Colonial Office had been able to elicit any definite answers from the WO.[1]

There can be no question that to some extent the complaints made by the CAS were justified. The WO, obdurately opposed to the scheme from the start on the grounds that it had no chance of success, had certainly not gone out of their way to assist the Air Ministry. Despite public protestations of loyalty, they had entered into cooperation with very little heart in their work and a great deal of reservation. A number of examples can be cited. In January 1921, Sir Arthur Hirtzel, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for India, had complained to Churchill about Haldane's "obstructiveness", stating that answers to important questions had been delayed for over two weeks.[2] This comment prompted Churchill to write a strong letter of protest to Worthington-Evans, then the Under-Secretary of State for War, reproaching the WO for their "inveterate hostility". The letter was couched in such strong terms that, on reflection, Churchill decided not to send it.[3]

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1. Air 8/34, Minute 16, 23 January 1922.
2. Gilbert, op.cit., p.519.
3. Ibid., pp.519-20.

On another occasion Trenchard wrote to Borton, "I am trying to reach an agreement with the WO with reference to the handing over of the surplus building material accumulated by the Army but have not yet been able to obtain a decision." In the same letter, too, referring to a WO demand for ten instead of eight squadrons of aircraft in the proposed scheme, he wrote:

> It is part of the tactics of the Army to embarrass us by demanding two additional squadrons, the provision of which they are aware would prove a severe strain on our resources at the present juncture .. [1]

AVM Sir Geoffrey Salmond, too, had written to Trenchard towards the end of 1921 to report that he was experiencing difficulty with the Army over the proposed building programme. The trouble was, he complained, the Army had originally agreed to carry out these services and they were therefore not dealt with by the Air Force. He continued:

> The Army, however, appears to be delaying matters whereas if they were going to remain in Mesopotamia they would have got the money and would be pushing on with the building concerned as fast as possible.[2]

At one stage relations had become so estranged that Churchill threatened to dispense with British forces altogether, complaining that the WO wished to maintain as many non-combatant as combatant troops in the Mandate.[3] Troubles there had been, too, over the supply of armoured cars. Nonetheless, by the date of Trenchard's complaint to Churchill, the 23rd January, the WO had confirmed with the Colonial Office and, via them, with the Air Ministry itself, that three companies of armoured cars or light tanks would be available when the Air Force scheme came into operation.[4]

In fact, the real bone of contention, and one not mentioned

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1. Trenchard Papers, II/27/20, Trenchard to Borton, 28 July 1921.
2. Ibid., II/27/144/2, Sir Geoffrey Salmond to Trenchard, 16 November 1921.
3. CO 730/15, Churchill to Colonial Office, 26 July 1921.
4. CO 730/13, WO to Colonial Office, 24 September 1921.

by Trenchard in his memo, was the fact that, despite the recommendation of the Joint Military and Political Committee at the Cairo Conference that the imperial forces should be stationed at Amara - a decision reached after strong military opposition to the alternative site at Baghdad - the Air Ministry had gone ahead with their plans to station HQ forces near the capital. With the growing menace from the north, about which, it should be noted, the AOC Mesopotamia was himself seriously concerned,[1] the WO could not ignore the very real danger of external aggression and the consequences such aggression was likely to have on the internal situation. The Air Force scheme was untried and suspect, and the WO had an undisputed obligation towards the safety of their own forces and those of the RAF.

On the 30th January 1922, the Middle East Department of the Colonial Office, in consultation with members of the Air Staff, came to the conclusion that they had no option but to accept the WO's decision.[2] Early the following month the Viceroy's Army Department informed the Secretary of State for India that they too were not prepared to expose Indian troops to risks which the WO were unwilling to entertain in respect of British troops.[3] At the same time the Air Minister, Captain F.E. Guest, noted in a memo to his Chief of Staff that Churchill fully realised that he was "sitting on a volcano" and counted upon the Air Force and the Air Force alone to see him through.[4]

The following day a conference of Ministers,[5] chaired by the

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1. Trenchard Papers, II/27/20, Borton to Trenchard, 17 February 1922. Borton writes, ".. although I would be prepared to risk keeping one squadron and one armoured car company there unsupported indefinitely as far as the internal situation is concerned, I do not think it would be justified with this threat from outside, which could concentrate practically within two night marches of Mosul."
2. CO 730/32, Middle East Department of the Colonial Office to Trenchard, 30 January 1922.
3. Air 5/476, Viceroy, Army Department, to Secretary of State for India, 7 February 1922.
4. Trenchard Papers, CII/8, Secretary of State for Air to CAS, 8 February 1922.
5. Cabinet Meeting 14(22), 2 March 1922 (Cab 23/29) gives summary of this Conference.

Prime Minister, was held to discuss the situation in Mesopotamia. At this meeting the WO carried their objections further. The Secretary of State for War stated that the WO could now assume no responsibility for reinforcing or rescuing any forces of the Air Ministry which might become besieged in Baghdad or elsewhere in the country. If trouble occurred and the nation insisted on a relief expedition, there could well be a repetition of the situation at the time of the siege of Gordon at Khartoum.

A General Staff memo, circulated at the meeting, resurrected the question of the defence of Mosul. It argued that when the existing garrison in Mesopotamia had been decided at the Cairo Conference, one of the basic conditions had been the creation of a friendly Turkey. In fact, the problem of Turkish aggression was becoming daily more imminent. Once the armoured car company and RAF squadron were left isolated at Mosul, they would be a prey to frequent acts of sabotage. If openly attacked, they would have to retreat and this would mean that over 100 personnel and vital stores would have to be carried in open vehicles for a journey of some 300 miles. As the cars would have to be kept to the roads, it could be confidently predicted that ambushes would be laid. The memo concluded:

> If the political reasons for retaining this detachment in Mosul are overwhelming perhaps all military objections may have to be discounted, but the General Staff feel bound to add that they can see no political gain which will in any way compensate for the consequences, political as well as military, of the defeat and capture of these British units.[1]

As a solution to the problem, the War Minister urged that all troops should be withdrawn to the area around Basra. Apart from effecting a large reduction in liabilities, this would also save some £5 million per annum. Churchill retorted that £5 million had already been saved in the current year's estimates and that for the year 1923-24 it was hoped to reduce the cost of the garrison to some £3 or £4 million. He felt confident that the Air Force

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1. Cab 24/133, CP 3717, 9 February 1922.

scheme could deal with the present situation, especially as there was no evidence that a Turkish invasion was contemplated during the next two months.[1]

The conclusions reached at this conference went some way towards vindicating the arguments put forward by the WO. It was agreed that part of the existing garrison should remain at Mosul until the conclusion of the forthcoming conference on the Turkish-Greek peace settlement, but that their further retention should be reconsidered before the beginning of May. The conference also agreed, however, that under the same conditions, two white battalions would be retained at Baghdad, and it called upon the WO to give every assistance to the Air Ministry when they were taking over the units and individuals of the Army ancillary services. It was also concluded that the Air Ministry should continue to raise such armoured car units as they required for service in Mesopotamia and Palestine, but that "this should in no way prejudice any future discussion by the Cabinet on the general question of the responsibilities of the Royal Navy, the Army and the RAF".[2]

In a letter to Borton a few days later, the CAS confirmed that, as a result of Cabinet pressure, the WO had abandoned their objections to keeping troops in the territory. He now openly welcomed, too, the ruling that the Air Force should raise and maintain its own armoured car companies. This had become necessary because of WO delays, he maintained, but, in fact, as these companies would be the only regular troops engaged in active operations, it would make matters of command that much easier.[3] At about this time, too, the air control scheme also received strong public support from Sir Sefton Brancker to counteract what his biographer terms the Army's "destructive and retrogressive policy".[4] In a letter to *The Daily Telegraph* he pointed out that the Army's attacks on the RAF were "far more bitter and jealous than the public have imagined". It was wrong but understandable

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1. Cabinet Meeting 14(22), 2 March 1922, (Cab 23/29), refers.
2. Ibid.
3. Trenchard Papers, II/27/20, Trenchard to Borton, 10 March 1922.
4. Macmillan, op.cit., pp.254-59.

that the General Staff should strive to preserve their power and restore their "dwindling establishments". Aviation alone, however, could maintain order in such territories as Mesopotamia if the nation were not to go bankrupt. Neither of the older services had the knowledge or the faith necessary to make the full, economical use of aviation.[1]

By April 1922 WO opposition appeared to be over. Trenchard wrote to Ironside during that month, "... You may be glad to hear that since I saw you last we are all a happy family again between the army side and the air side, and I hope to goodness it will never break out into a quarrel again. The Army are doing all they can to help us, and I hope we are doing our small part to help them."[2] The major reason for this happier relationship was undoubtedly the retirement of Wilson as CIGS earlier in the year and his replacement by the more affable, easy-going Lord Cavan.[3] "With Lord Cavan as CIGS," wrote Trenchard to Borton, "the attitude of the WO towards us has .. changed very greatly for the better, and this is all to the good, as it will permeate in due course throughout the Army and will make our task very much easier."[4] Following this more conciliatory line, the WO wrote to the Colonial Office at the beginning of June to say that in the opinion of Lt.General Sir Aylmer Haldane, four battalions would suffice for the regular infantry garrison of Mesopotamia and that the Army Council were prepared to accept a reduction on this basis.[5]

But if a change at "the shop" brought an easing of tension between the Ministries, a change at HQ Baghdad at this time had the opposite effect. In March Haldane was replaced by Major General Sir Theodore Fraser as GOC Iraq.[6] Until this date,

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1. Macmillan, op.cit., pp.254-59. Letter dated 13 February 1922. Brancker was appointed Director of Civil Aviation three months later.
2. Trenchard Papers, II/27/99, 13 April 1922. Trenchard was promoted to ACM on 1 April 1922.
3. General Lord Cavan was appointed CIGS 19 February 1922.
4. Trenchard Papers, II/27/20, Trenchard to Borton, 8 May 1922.
5. Air 5/476, WO to Colonial Office, 2 June 1922.
6. At about this time the name "Iraq" became widely used.

relations between the Army and Air Force staffs had been good. Haldane, for one reason or another, had come to view the air control scheme with favour, whilst Borton, writing to Trenchard at the beginning of 1922, had been full of praise for his military colleagues. He wrote:

> I should like in this connection again to emphasise the invaluable assistance I have always had from the Army - the C-in-C, Col.Frith and Heads of Departments downwards have gone out of their way to consult our interests and to help generally about the future. I feel sure that if the WO would only adopt as reasonable an attitude, it would relieve you of much unnecessary trouble ..[1]

Fraser too, on the eve of his appointment, wrote to Trenchard, "The more I see of the men and the methods of the Army and RAF in connection with one another out here the more I wonder why 'friction' is so dreaded in London. There's not a suspicion of it in Iraq and the handing over will be quite smooth." [2]

Within a few weeks of this handover, however, Borton was warning Trenchard that the new C-in-C might "start some ill-considered hare in his personal letters to Lord Cavan".[3] Then in early July, in confirmation of his fears, he informed the CAS that a cable he had written to AVM Sir John Salmond concerning the part played by the Air Force in the recent operations in the Sulaimania district had been redrafted by General Fraser. Claims made as to the successful effect of air action had been "blue-pencilled" on the grounds that it was too early to make any definite statement. The new C-in-C, Borton advised, was openly antagonistic to the RAF scheme and was incapable of visualising the possibilities of the new arm. As one of the old school, he was in favour of increasing the number of troops, especially as this would justify the appointment of a general officer commanding. Borton feared that he had already resurrected with

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1. Trenchard Papers, II/27/20, Borton to Trenchard, 6 January 1922.
2. Ibid., II/27/69, Fraser to CAS, 8 May 1922.
3. Ibid., II/27/20, Borton to CAS, 8 June 1922.

Lord Rawlinson the bogey of the danger of keeping Indian troops at Baghdad. Fraser's attitude might lead to difficulties not only at home but also in Sir John's conversations in India concerning the future of the air arm in that country.[1] But Trenchard was anxious not to rock the boat at this juncture. He told Churchill that it was most important to avoid friction with the Army authorities until the RAF had taken over, and that he had instructed Borton along these lines. Iraq was the one place where the Air Ministry had so far succeeded in keeping on friendly terms with the military element.[2] In a private letter to Salmond just two days later, Trenchard expressed anxiety about continual criticism from the WO concerning bombing operations in Iraq. Churchill, he wrote, was becoming a little alarmed and was inclined to think that a great crisis was imminent.[3]

At the beginning of August, Fraser launched his long-awaited attack upon the system of air control. In a letter to his Secretary of State, he advised that the Iraqi Army was highly suspect as a fighting force. It carried no prestige to help it maintain internal order, and it would be incapable of making any stand against regular troops for many months to come. At Mosul, he instanced, 75% of the men had done less than six months service and a large number of the Mosulawis were of very doubtful quality. As for the Iraqi levies, these were not and never would be a homogeneous force.[4] Fraser followed this up with a letter to Trenchard the next day in which, whilst praising the work of the RAF contingent, he maintained that the cooperation between the levies and aeroplanes "cannot be as close as theory thinks".[5]

The outcome of Fraser's report to the WO was a letter from Worthington-Evans to Churchill enclosing a paper by the General Staff. Once again the matter of the defence of Mosul was raised.

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1. Trenchard Papers, II/27/20, Borton to Trenchard, 6 July 1922. See also CO 730/32. Salmond's mission to India is discussed in Chapter 6 of this work.
2. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/50; Trenchard to Churchill, 25 July 1922.
3. Ibid., CII/27/143/2, Trenchard to Salmond, 27 July 1922.
4. CO 730/32, Fraser to Secretary of State for War, 1 August 1922.
5. Trenchard Papers, II/27/69, Fraser to CAS, 2 August 1922.

The Secretary of State for War contended that the levies were not up to the required standard, yet these were the very forces which would bear the first brunt of an attack upon Mosul. The General Staff agreed that Iraq had been free from any organised uprising since 1920, but felt that this was probably due to the memory of the punishment inflicted by the Army during the rebellion of that year.[1] As this memory faded and the reduction of the British garrison revealed a weakening of our strength, the risk of internal disorder would certainly increase. The solution, reiterated the General Staff, was a strengthening of the garrison or the withdrawal of the present forces to the area around Basra. The WO were not opposed to the Air Force scheme, but too sudden and too drastic a reduction of the garrison would hardly give the experiment a fair chance. And it was all an experiment. The placing of Feisal on the throne was an experiment, the Iraqi Army was an experiment, and the levies were still in the experimental stage. Finally, the RAF scheme itself was an experiment.[2]

Trenchard, fearing even at this late stage that such attacks might weaken Churchill's resolve, informed him that Fraser was doubtless the major source of the agitation and sent him Borton's letter of the 6th July to give him "the other side of the picture".[3] But as far as the Colonial Office were concerned, the Army's attacks were seen as their "Parthian epistle", and they informed the WO that they were prepared to accept the risks involved.[4] Even at this late hour, however, there was concern within the Colonial Office over the possibility of a last minute hitch. In a letter to Major H. Young concerning Trenchard's wish that

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1. Towards the end of 1920 punitive expeditions burnt villages, collected fines, and confiscated 60,000 rifles and three million rounds of ammunition. See Gilbert, op.cit., pp.496-7.
2. CO 730/32, Worthington-Evans to Churchill, 4 August 1922.
3. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/50, Trenchard to Churchill, 8 August 1922.
4. CO 730/32, Meinertzhagen to Young, 9 August 1922, refers. Both were serving in the Middle East Department of the Colonial Office, Meinertzhagen as Military Advisor and Young as Assistant Secretary.

troops should remain in Mosul until the handover of responsibility, Colonel R. Meinertzhagen refers to the danger of Fraser staying in command and the consequent deferment of the air scheme.[1] Nor did the WO slacken their efforts as the handover date approached. Indeed, doubtless anxious that their opposition should be well remembered should their gloomy predictions come true, they sent a letter to the Colonial Office as late as the 26th August enclosing Fraser's criticisms and a General Staff note drawing attention to the tense situation prevailing in Iraq.[2]

On 1st October the military control of Iraq was handed over to AVM Sir John Salmond. The RAF were given the chance they had for so long sought, but the opportunity was only won with difficulty and was only to be retained with difficulty. At the beginning of the previous month war had only just been averted between Britain and Turkey during the Chanak crisis. In Iraq itself the Turks were casting covetous eyes upon the oil-rich area of Mosul and stirring up anti-British feeling among the Kurdish tribes of the north. Trenchard wrote to Salmond towards the end of October:

> What I am frankly afraid of is that the WO will begin agitating again against the insecurity of their troops out there under our scheme, and I shall have a hard fight for it all over again to prove that we are competent to look after the Army just as much as they are competent to look after the Air.[3]

His fears were justified.

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1. CO 730/32, Meinertzhagen to Young, 14 August 1922.
2. Air 5/202, WO to Colonial Office, 26 August 1922.
3. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/143/2, Trenchard to Salmond, 21 October 1922.

PART I

THE SURVIVAL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, 1918-1926

Chapter 3

The Re-birth of an Independent Air Force

July 1921 - February 1926

Air control in Iraq, however, was in substitution for other forces. The WO could rightly claim that the task of imperial policing had been and could continue to be accomplished by ground forces, albeit with air support. From the Air Force's point of view, too, their scheme in Iraq, important though it was as a *raison d'être*, was a sideline rather than a vocation. Even the economic argument in favour of such work broke down if this was to be the sum total of the Air Staff's contribution. If the Air Force was to survive as a separate force then it would have to find a task peculiar to its own arm, a task in which the other services played a clearly ancillary part or no part at all. So long as there was no genuine, independent air striking power, there was no pressing need for an air strategy or for a centralised direction of air operations. Indeed, there was no need, some could argue, for an Air Ministry at all.

This lack of an independent role was fully appreciated by the Air Staff. An Air Ministry publication of July 1921 recognised that "the successful outcome of the war has greatly lessened the possible obligations of the independent Air Force at home". Formed amid the last knockings of the war and with insufficient time to prove its anticipated value, the Force could claim no right to an existence in the immediate postwar world. Russia was in a state of chaos; Germany had been defeated and chained; France was, for the present at least, an ally. The allocation of squadrons at this time clearly reflected the low priority given to home defence. Of the 24 squadrons possessed by the RAF, eight were in Egypt and six in Iraq. Only three were stationed in the United Kingdom.

Looking to the future, however, the Air Staff lost no opportunity in pointing out that as soon as conditions changed, and France or any other continental Power had to be reckoned with as a potential enemy, then the air defence of the nation would depend not so much upon passive defence as upon the strength of the aerial attack which could be launched upon the enemy. The "bolt from the blue" would become a real possibility and instant steps would have to be taken to "maintain the independent Air

Force on a very considerable scale in Home Areas".[1]

The Air Ministry and the country at large had not long to wait for possibility to give way to reality. The scare was started in October, when an editorial in *Flight Magazine* claimed that, in contravention of Article 198, the Germans had hidden away 2,000 to 3,000 aero engines of a type suitable for military use.[2] This allegation was not taken very seriously, but in the following Spring a more formidable and immediate threat was brought to the public's notice. A series of articles by P.R.C. Groves in *The Times* drew attention to the growing might of the French Air Force. The French, claimed Groves, possessed 126 squadrons compared in Britain with a force of 7 squadrons, including aircraft allotted to cooperation with the Navy and Army.[3] Then in October Mr. Balfour, President of the Council, informed the CID that the French were "overwhelmingly superior" in regard to airpower, having 47 independent air squadrons compared with three in the RAF. He viewed the situation with "profound alarm".[4] At the following meeting Trenchard warned that the air menace from France would be a grave danger in future years if relations with our neighbour became unsatisfactory. Britain was very vulnerable to air attack from the continent.[5]

The Editor of *Flight Magazine*, readily seizing upon this new source of danger, declared that the only way in which the Empire could be safeguarded from aerial attack was by what he termed "an offensive-defensive long-distance striking force".[6] By this time, too, with Anglo-French relations embittered by divergent views over reparations and the Chanak crisis, Balfour was seeing the protection of the United Kingdom against air attack as "the most formidable defence problem" facing the country. The CAS

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1. Brooke-Popham Papers, IX/5/12, Air Ministry Publication, July 1921.
2. *Flight Magazine*, Editorial, Vol.XIII, 20 October 1921, p.681.
3. Brigadier General P.R.C.Groves, *Our Future in the Air*, (pub.1935), p.102.
4. Cab 2/3, CID 145th Meeting, 14 October 1921.
5. Ibid., 146th Meeting, 21 October 1921.
6. *Flight Magazine*, Editorial, Vol.XIV, 30 March 1922, p.183.

concurred and adroitly pointed out that in view of that situation it was most desirable that the position of the Air Force in relation to the Army and Navy - then under discussion - should be speedily settled.[1] The same day, the Air Ministry produced a paper on the vulnerability of the British Isles to air attack. Referring to the recent naval settlement at Washington, it claimed that the menace of attack from the air appeared to be more formidable than a somewhat fanciful possibility of a naval war with the USA or any other Power. The paper continued:

> The continental menace is now from the air and not from the sea, not from a landing on these islands by armed forces, but from repeated incursions on a large scale by hostile aircraft operating from the sky and returning to their own bases.

Germany, unlikely to compete at sea again, would probably concentrate her resources on airpower in the future, while France, although at present friendly, had been an enemy in the past and possessed a very large air force.[2]

The paper was discussed at a meeting of the CID early in November, when it was agreed that a special committee should be appointed to go fully into the question of the vulnerability of the British Isles to air attack and the measures necessary to meet such an attack.[3]

Up to this point the CIGS, an avowed francophil, had paid scant attention to the matter. Commenting upon the CID meeting in his diary that evening, Wilson wrote: "It was all so unreal that I could take no interest, but I could not help pointing out that it was curious that, on Trenchard's showing, a country without a separate Air Ministry could annhilate a country with a separate Air Ministry."[4] When the matter was again raised, however, at a CID meeting later that month, Wilson took a more forceful line. There was in his view no menace from the French. They had no aggressive intentions except perhaps towards the Ruhr. He admitted

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1. Cab 2/3, CID 147th Meeting, 31 October 1921.
2. Cab 5/4, CID Paper 156-C, 31 October 1921.
3. Cab 2/3, CID 148th Meeting, 9 November 1921.
4. Wilson Diary, 9 November 1921.

that they possessed a powerful, modern army and air force but, seeing that the whole continent was in a state of chaos, he considered this to be a blessing rather than a menace. France was the one steadying factor in Europe, and England (*sic*) was exceptionally fortunate in having such a friend at such a moment.[1]

Such advice, though eminently reasonable, was ignored by the Air Staff and the Air Ministry. In early December the Secretary of State for Air added to the fears he had helped to engender. He told the CID that the situation with regard to French airpower was worse than previously thought. Conscription provided the French with an unlimited number of ready-made mechanics and this made possible an immediate expansion of their air force upon mobilisation.[2] On the same day, the Prime Minister wired to Balfour, our representative at the Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armaments, to inform him of the Committee's concern and of their view that no limitation of aircraft was practicable.[3]

To these gloomy statistics were added the even gloomier predictions of the fiction writer H.G. Wells. According to one observer, his prophecies concerning aerial bombardment in a future war, published in the *Daily Express* at this time, were enough to "make our flesh creep".[4]

At this stage, the WO attitude to the question was that it could not possibly be studied in isolation. At the first meeting of the special sub-committee, the DMO, Major General Sir Percy Radcliffe, maintained that war could not be waged by one of the services alone in a "water-tight compartment". If HMG seriously contemplated preparing for war with France, then should not the Committee study the question comprehensively and include the measures necessary to deal with the naval and military forces of France? To this, the Air Ministry representative retorted that the admitted air menace might be decisive without the army of either nation becoming involved.[5] It was this arrogant attitude adopted

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1. Cab 2/3, CID 151st Meeting, 26 November 1921.
2. Ibid., 153rd Meeting, 6 December 1921.
3. Cab 4/7, CID Paper 299-B, 6 December 1921.
4. *Flight Magazine*, Editorial, Vol.XIII, 15 December 1921, p.822.
5. Air 8/39, 13 December 1921.

by the Air Ministry to which the WO could rightly take exception.

Later in the month an Air Staff memo actually selected France as the potential enemy and argued that the average weight of bombs which could be dropped by France, allowing for only twenty bombing days a month and using but 50% of their force, was something like 1,600 tons a month. London was liable to receive 147 tons in the first 24 hours, 110 tons in the second 24 hours, and 73½ tons in subsequent 24 hour periods. This compared with the 12 tons dropped on England during September 1917, the heaviest weight of bombs dropped by the Germans in any one month. So continuous would be the attack, predicted the Air Staff, that it would be impossible to repair damage already done and the mobilisation of the Army would be seriously affected.[1] In the New Year the Secretary of State for Air informed the Cabinet that the French were building 150 machines a month compared with a home production of 23 per annum. It was generally agreed that the French air development constituted a formidable danger and the CID was asked to expedite its enquiries concerning the continental air menace.[2]

Shortly afterwards, the General Staff let it be known that in their view the Air Staff's predictions were exaggerated to the point of being alarmist. In a paper to the Sub-Committee in late March they made it clear that, whilst they accepted as a basis the scale of attack laid down by the Air Staff and elaborated in subsequent papers, they wished to place on record that they hesitated to accept these statements as a true picture of what might happen. In the first place, they were unable to envisage an international situation in which France would be able to concentrate the whole of her Air Force against this country. Secondly, the estimates of the scale of such an attack did not take into account the effect of counter attacks by the RAF, and they greatly minimised the physical effects of climate and the psychological effects of temperament.[3] For their part, the Admiralty took the line adopted earlier by the General Staff.

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1. Air 8/39, 23 December 1921.
2. Cab 23/29, Cabinet Meeting 18(22), 15 March 1922.
3. Cab 16/39, CID Continental Air Menace, 27 March 1922.

At the second meeting of the Sub-Committee, the First Sea Lord, Admiral Beatty, said that while he did not think it were possible for the Committee to controvert the "lurid and heart rending picture" drawn by the Air Force, he felt it impossible to discuss a continental air attack without making reference to the other fighting services. At this meeting, however, the new CIGS, General Lord Cavan, responsible as he was for the static home defences, took a more cautious view and did not seek to minimise "the undoubted menace which existed".[1] Nor, indeed, did Balfour. In his summary of the situation he once more gave his imagination free rein. The Army and Navy would be paralysed, London would be made uninhabitable, lines of communication would be cut. In short, an enemy could strike a blow which would render the nation almost impotent. He concluded:

> The proper reply to aerial attack is aerial defence and aerial counter-attack, and our relatively insignificant Air Force is incapable of either.[2]

The picture so vividly painted by Lord Balfour must be seen as the product of "the heat-oppressed brain".[3] As Collier points out, there was little evidence to support his fears and contentions.[4] They were amply sufficient, however, to stir the imaginations of fellow politicians. At the beginning of June the Parliamentary Air Committee, in a letter to the Prime Minister, predicted that, in the initial stages, the next war would be largely decided in the air and urged the Government to increase the strength of the Air Force.[5]

A month later at a special meeting of the CID at which the Prime Minister presided, the report of the Sub-Committee was again discussed. It recommended the organisation of a defence zone and an increase in the home air force from 3 to 15 squadrons in order that an offensive organisation might be created. Lloyd George, concerned lest weakness in the air might place his Government at

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1. Cab 16/39, 29 March 1922.
2. Cab 3/3, CID Paper 108-A, 29 May 1922.
3. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act II, Scene 1, line 39.
4. Basil Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p.11.
5. Cab 4/8, CID Paper 349-B, 2 June 1922.

a diplomatic disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the French, agreed that the RAF should be strengthened but, with cost in mind, was uncertain as to the best method to adopt.[1] At a later meeting he astutely pointed out that by not possessing a separate Air Force the French appeared to obtain more for their money. They were more readily able to use the personnel and *matériel* belonging to their Army. The Secretary of State for War wholeheartedly agreed with this comment and was quick to suggest that an estimated saving of £1 million might be effected by amalgamation. With a unified service, skilled tradesmen might be available for both Army and Air Force work. In reply, the Air Minister, Captain Guest, denied that his administration was wasteful and referred to the findings of the Geddes Committee, but his assurances only served to ward off, not to destroy, the WO attack.[2]

At the beginning of August the CID recommended the adoption of the Air Ministry's revised scheme providing for 23 squadrons (14 bomber and 9 fighter) for Home Defence,[3] and these recommendations were adopted by the Cabinet the following day.[4] In view of the impressive French programme at this time and the threat it was held to contain, Trenchard's programme must be regarded as modest. Boyle states that privately Trenchard dismissed the French threat as "a political chimera of the first magnitude".[5] This might well be so, but in public the Air Ministry certainly made the most of what was, in fact, a highly problematical threat, both as regards to strength and feasibility. Roskill, in a study of navy-air force relations of this period, refers to information from the French *Service Historique de l'armée de l'air* to show that the Air Ministry took the worst possible case with regard to the tonnage of bombs which could be dropped on London in the first 24 hours of a war. The *Service Historique* also points out that during the so-called menace the French bomber squadrons were actually stationed in eastern France or in Germany and that a major redeployment would have

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1. Cab 2/3, CID 158th Meeting, 5 July 1922.
2. Ibid., 162nd Meeting, 31 July 1922.
3. Ibid., 163rd Meeting, 2 August 1922.
4. Cab 23/30, Cabinet Meeting, 3 August 1922.
5. Boyle, op.cit., p.431.

been necessary before any serious attack on England could have been mounted. It is improbable, as Roskill points out, that the Air Ministry was unaware of such facts.[1]

Shortly after the Cabinet's decision, the Coalition Government fell from power and the question of home defence expansion schemes and, indeed, the very survival of the Air Force as an independent service, were put in the balance once more. On taking office in the new Government, the Secretary of State for Air, Sir Samuel Hoare, was advised by the Prime Minister that he did not intend to retain the Air Force as a separate department.[2] At first, however, Trenchard appeared confident that the new Administration appreciated the increasing importance of the air. He told AVM Sir Edward Ellington towards the end of October that it should be made clear to all that the future of the RAF was not in the melting pot. "The Government," he wrote, "owing to the urgent need for economy, are reviewing all the commitments in every walk of life and policy."[3] Such was the air of uncertainty surrounding the new government's intentions, however, that only a few days later he was fearing that the new administration might put the Air Ministry under the WO and reduce commitments in Iraq and Palestine.[4]

Early in 1923 the question of home defence was given fresh impetus by the French occupation of the Ruhr. This sudden crisis, though never a *casus belli*, added weight to arguments which might otherwise have been dismissed as unrealistic or as economically unacceptable by the new government. Nevertheless, the Air Ministry fully realised that they were still under a suspended sentence. Trenchard wrote to Salmond in February: "The PM cannot make up his mind about the Air Service as far as I can see, or about Iraq.

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1. Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, p.382.
2. Viscount Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p.36. Hoare was appointed Secretary of State for Air on 2 November 1922.
3. Trenchard Papers, II/27/63/1, Trenchard to Ellington, 27 October 1922. Ellington was then AOC Middle East.
4. Ibid., Trenchard to Ellington, 30 October and 9 November 1922.

He wants peace at any price..."[1]

In a memo to the Cabinet in the same month, Hoare was at pains to point out that if it were not possible to fulfil the expansion programme to counter the French menace, then it was necessary to go for quality in material as well as in personnel. This made the problem of research vital. Furthermore, numerical inferiority made it all the more essential that the development of such forces should be concentrated in one organisation and not dissipated by breaking up the Air Force into three fragments. If the Cabinet set aside the one power standard as impracticable, then the need was to maintain a highly trained and consequently expensive *Air corps d'élite* to ensure quality as against quantity.[2] The other service chiefs saw no need for such extravagance. At his first meeting with them, Hoare was bluntly told that, in their view, a third service was indefensible.[3] Indeed, it was only after some powerful pleading on the part of the Air Minister - according to Montgomery Hyde - that Bonar Law, a man with little interest in matters of defence, agreed to the setting up of an impartial committee to "enquire into the cooperation and correlation of the fighting services".[4]

The so-called Salisbury Committee, set up the following month, was to afford the WO a further opportunity not only to oppose what they regarded as an unwarranted expansion of the independent bomber force at the expense of the older services, but also to reopen their case against the very existence of a third service. In fact, however, the enquiry, held throughout the Spring and Summer of 1923, came at a most inopportune time for the Army. Quite apart from the deep concern felt by many politicians and some of the public over the French air threat at this particular juncture, the system of air control introduced into Iraq six months previously had, on the face of it, proved capable of

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1. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/143/2, Trenchard to Salmond, 28 February 1923.
2. Cab 24/158, CP 88(23), February 1923.
3. Montgomery Hyde, op.cit., p.115.
4. Ibid., pp.116-7, and W.J.Reader, *Architect of Air Power*, pp.102-3.

counteracting the Turkish menace in the north, thus confounding the gloomy predictions of the General Staff.[1] Before the enquiry got under way, therefore, the War Minister, Lord Derby, wrote to Lord Salisbury, warning him against any reductions in the Army to set off increases in the Air Force. He explained that any increase in the air arm would, in fact, add to the work of the Army. More ground troops would have to be provided to "follow and consolidate the results obtained by air action" and more ground installations would have to be defended. His letter concluded:

> I feel I must place on record my opinion that the committee will be failing in its objects unless it reviews the military commitments of the Empire in relation to our military strength. .. It is only on the assumption that this question will not be overlooked that I can willingly consent to serve as a member of the committee.[2]

In presenting their case to the Sub-Committee, the WO marshalled their arguments well. In essence, they called for separate air arms for the Navy and Army and a reduced Air Ministry to administer research, experiment, supply and civil aviation. The foundations of the new service, complained the General Staff, had been laid in so critical a period of war that the process had passed almost unnoticed and it was not until the end of the war that the *fait accompli* had been disclosed. Since then they had protested as to the unsoundness of the measure. It was significant that this "costly experiment" had not been adopted by any other country.

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1. Trenchard wrote to Salmond on 6 June 1923: "I cannot emphasise too much the value your successful command in Iraq has been to us." See Trenchard Papers, CII/27/143/2.

2. Derby Papers, WO 137/12, Derby to Salisbury, 12 March 1923. Military commitments at this time were: India, a force of nearly 70,000 men made up of 8 cavalry regiments, 45 infantry battalions and 55 field batteries; elsewhere overseas, 37 battalions, including 27 on the Rhine, in the Constantinople area and in Egypt; at home, 53 battalions and 9 cavalry regiments. See N.H. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, Vol.I, p.52.

Air action, their argument continued, could do no more than contribute to the victory of one side or the other; it could not by itself achieve or consolidate that victory. The Army and Navy had their own distinct spheres of action on the earth's surface, whilst the Air Force was supplementary to both in a "secondary plane". The Air Force was a new arm, not a new service. Thus in any military or naval operations, aircraft must be at the absolute disposal of the commanders and staffs concerned. Otherwise there would be the danger of independent action and the consequent diversion of resources and effort.

Turning to the question of the independent use of aircraft in home defence, the General Staff did not consider that it was such a distinct and specialised task as to warrant the maintenance of a separate air staff and air ministry. The WO viewed home defence as a single problem in which naval, military and air forces all had a part to play. It was, moreover, a normal problem of modern warfare well within the competence of the General Staff. It was agreed that aircraft would at times be the principal arm employed by both sides, but this would only require that the General Staff should include officers thoroughly trained in air fighting and that the "General Staff as a body should be as familiar with the capabilities of the aeroplane as with those of other weapons at their disposal". There was, too, the danger of divided control. The searchlights, sound locators and anti-aircraft guns which worked with the aircraft were organised by the Army. It seemed unwise to give over all control to an independent staff specialising in the use of one particular weapon.

The Sub-Committee was reminded, too, that the Air Force could never free itself from its administrative dependence on Army lines of communication and Army ground protection. Indeed, the proportion of ground troops in a defence scheme of England, and the importance of such troops, was so great that, should an Air Ministry be maintained in its present form, it would have to be provided with staff officers and experts by the WO. In short, the WO could not visualise air action in the military sphere except as part and parcel of the general strategic plan for which the General Staff were responsible. All the needs of the new service could be

met by grafting an air staff branch onto the WO staff within the Army Council, and by fitting Air Force commands into the chain of Army commands. It was conceded that an Air Ministry would be required for civil aviation, research, experiment and supply, but relieved of its military responsibilities, it could be much reduced.

On the policing of Iraq and Palestine, the General Staff continued to maintain that the air scheme was "fundamentally unsound". Army control was necessary to put the Air Force in and to bring them out. "Sandwiched" between these two phases there was, indeed, a period of air control but this was, in reality, a policing rather than a fighting interlude. As far as liabilities were concerned, it was a military rather than an air commitment.[1]

The problem of divided command as it affected the supply of aircraft for Army needs had been taken up earlier by the General Staff. They argued that, should the Air Force remain independent, the air contingent for the Expeditionary Force - then standing at eight squadrons - should be accepted as an integral and inalienable part of the field force. They asked that a definite guarantee should be given that these squadrons would be available when required. Furthermore, a similar undertaking was sought concerning the Army's minimum requirements overseas, namely six squadrons in India and two in Egypt, including a detached flight at Aden.[2]

In an earlier paper to the Committee, the Secretary of State for War had also raised the question of finance. Any expansion of the Air Force to meet corresponding developments in other countries would mean a reduction in the Army vote, Derby pointed out, despite the fact that Army commitments and possible future dangers were in no way reduced.[3]

The CIGS, before presenting his case, had warned Trenchard that he would pull no punches.[4] He was true to his word. In giving

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1. Cab 16/47, ND 40, 8 June 1923.
2. Ibid., ND 34, 16 May 1923.
3. Ibid., ND 14, 17 April 1923.
4. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/143/2, Letter, Trenchard to Salmond, refers, 6 June 1923.

evidence he showed, above all, a much more realistic approach to the potentialities of bombing than did the Air Staff. He thought it unthinkable that Britain would surrender its fleet and army just because London were bombed, nor did he think that the bombing would be anything like as severe as it was made out to be. He also took a more optimistic view and, as events were to prove, a more accurate one, of the effects of bombing upon troop movements. He told Hoare:

> You cannot be everywhere in the air because even with the .. strength of France against England at this moment I still think troops could be moved to suit the various concentrations as required.[1]

Furthermore, in a note presented to the Committee at their next meeting, Cavan expounded his views on the moral and material effect of bombing. He accused the Air Staff of giving rein to what he termed "an elastic imagination" as to the future possibilities of aerial bombardment. He maintained that the evidence as to the loss of output which occurred in the war through panic, desertion or fear was contradictory. It was safe to say that so far as industry was concerned, material damage to factories had a greater and more lasting result on production than did the moral effect on the workers. Indeed, he held that the effect of such bombing was to strengthen the determination of all classes to see the war through to a successful conclusion. It was therefore questionable whether intensive bombing of a section of the community at the very beginning of hostilities would shake the will to fight of the nation as a whole.[2]

Thus on the future role of the Air Force, Cavan argued that the Air Staff claimed "a little too much", relegating the Army to "escorting the air and nothing more". As the airman saw it, the Army was to advance slowly in order that aerodromes could be made behind it. From these aerodromes the air was to go on and win the war alone. That, he considered, was an exaggerated view. He conceded that the Air Force would develop and increase in strength,

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1. Air 8/63, ND 12th Meeting, 12 June 1923.
2. Cab 16/47, ND 49, 14 June 1923.

but so too would the opposition it would have to face.

The CIGS also had something to say on the question of divided command. He warned that to have two or more commanders-in-chief was "absolutely fatal". He would like to see the CAS a member of the Army Council, with the air branch taking its place alongside the administration and supply branches within the Army. Concerning the situation in Iraq, however, Cavan was much more on the defensive. In reply to searching questions from Lord Weir and Hoare, he claimed, not wholly convincingly, that had the Army been in control of the Mandate, the same use would have been made of aircraft as under the present scheme. The General Staff, Cavan assured the Committee, looked upon the air as an absolutely invaluable arm and would have been prepared to use it had it proved to be the cheapest and most efficient weapon. He denied, furthermore, that the WO had opposed the air experiment in Iraq, asserting that the General Staff had only been concerned lest they be called upon to get the Air Force out of a mess. The need for ground troops had been amply demonstrated earlier that year when the AOC had postponed the departure of two battalions during the crisis over Mosul.[1]

Returning to the question of French airpower, the General Staff argued that an attack on the part of France would be suicidal. France's concern with Germany must of necessity occupy all her thought and energy for at least the next two decades, and this made friendship with Britain essential. And even if an attack should materialise, the Air Ministry had exaggerated the danger. It was difficult to believe that French aircraft in North Africa could be used in such an attack. Moreover, of the 596 machines within the French Air Force, 300 were fighters or aircraft allotted to cooperation with their army. It had to be remembered, too, that any money expended on the RAF must react on the Navy and Army votes. This could lay open the Empire to attack and bring about defeat without the air force at home ever having been brought into action.[2] Derby likewise warned the Committee that panic legislation might result if the Committee's interim report were based on the Air

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1. Air 8/63, ND 13th Meeting, 14 June 1923.
2. Cab 16/47, ND 31, 11 May 1923.

Staff's figures. The WO considered that war with France was "a remote contingency".[1]

The General Staff's memo was promptly criticised by Balfour on the grounds that it was not of a military nature but dealt with purely political considerations.[2] This criticism was in some respects justified, but by this time Ministers were indeed becoming concerned at the political consequences of such defence measures. At a Cabinet meeting in May, the Lord President of the Council had been asked to make it clear in the House of Lords that the Government deprecated any talk of aggression on the part of France towards this country. The Government wished to make it plain that they could conceive of nothing worse than a competition in armaments with France.[3] On the 1st June, however, the Secretary of State for Air laid before the Salisbury Sub-Committee a scheme to increase the number of aircraft for home defence from 52 to 1,692 machines, carried out in four stages, in order to maintain a ratio of 3 to 4 with French air strength, real and projected.[4]

These figures were challenged by the WO. In a memo to the Cabinet, the War Minister claimed that, in calculating present needs at 594 aircraft, no allowance had been made for the normal expansion of British squadrons on the outbreak of war from a peace-time strength of 12 machines to a war-time strength of 18. Furthermore, the Air Ministry's solution was simply to form and maintain a large number of new formations to meet an eventuality which was "highly problematical". The General Staff considered that the problem had to be considered from two aspects. Firstly, the fighter aircraft and static defences required to meet and defeat the raiding aircraft; secondly, the counter-offensive measures provided not only by the Air Force but also by the Navy. Surely if London were bombed the Navy would be entitled to retaliate against French ports and coastal towns? There was, too, the threat of military operations against French colonies. The General Staff maintained that an economical and efficient

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1. Cab 16/46, ND 10th Meeting, 16 May 1923.
2. Ibid.
3. Cab 23/45, Cabinet Meeting 25(23), 9 May 1923.
4. Air 2/1267, ND 37, 1 June 1923.

organisation could be devised which, on mobilisation, would provide a number of highly efficient squadrons. These, together with the latent power of the Royal Navy, would provide the necessary deterrent to sudden attack.

Turning to the question of cost - an aspect with which the Bonar Law administration was desperately concerned - the paper maintained that the additional expense of any defence scheme need not be so large as that proposed. Substantial economies could be made by the amalgamation of the RAF schools with existing Army schools of the same type; by the reorganisation of the instructional staff of the flying schools; the abolition of certain HQ establishments, and the reduction of the very large staffs at others. Home defence, it argued, was a single problem and could not be solved merely by the sudden expansion of a single arm.[1]

In presenting their case before the Salisbury Sub-Committee, the Air Staff again laid great stress upon Britain's vulnerability to aerial attack and made much play upon the potentiality of strategic bombing. In his evidence, the CAS argued that the enormous increase in airpower since the late war would have an "overwhelming effect". He maintained that all ports in the south of England would be unusable and that repairs would not be able to be made as quickly as damage were being done - an assumption which prompted Balfour to comment: "If Plymouth and Bristol are shut up, you cannot feed London".[2] An earlier Air Staff paper had raised more sinister dangers. It had warned that, in a future war, London would be uninhabitable and that, under the "fearful strain of unremitting air attack", revolution might gain the upper hand.[3]

Thus the Air Staff remained convinced that the effect of air attack in the future could be of such proportions as in itself to bring hostilities to an early and successful conclusion. They agreed with the WO that the Air Force could not occupy a country, but maintained that, following sufficient air bombardment, occupation would be unnecessary simply because the very factor

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1. Cab 24/160, CP 294, 15 June 1923.
2. Air 8/63, ND 6th and 9th Meetings, 26 April and 10 May 1923.
3. Cab 16/47, ND 10, April 1923.

which had brought about the enemy's capitulation - repeated air attacks - remained as a real threat. Airpower could strike at the vitals of a nation. The Army, on the other hand, was confined to a single line of attack along which it could advance but slowly and at the cost of heavy fighting. It could take months, possibly years, before such an approach would affect the morale of an enemy nation.

On the matter of army-air cooperation, the Air Staff stated that they were in no position to make a definite allotment of squadrons to the Army until some idea had been gained as to the type of enemy to be fought.[1] Trenchard himself admitted frankly that whilst he was most anxious to meet the Army's requirements, of the eight squadrons assigned to the Expeditionary Force, only one was available at that time.[2]

Turning to the controversial subject of strategic bombing, the Air Staff considered that the Army was entirely out of touch with public opinion and still appeared to be labouring under the fallacy that so long as the army and navy were comparatively intact, the position of London and the civil population generally were of little account. Such a mistaken attitude was a "striking example of the wisdom of the proverb *ne suter ultra crepidum* - the General Staff cobbler should stick to his last". The WO were wrong to assume that they were the only people concerned with strategy, that the strategical plan was the Army's plan, and that no other force could play a part.[3]

By the beginning of June a victory over the WO was confidently anticipated by the Air Ministry. Indeed, by this time Trenchard saw the attacks by the General Staff as a factor in helping to defeat a more dangerous threat - the Navy's demand for its own air service. He reasoned that whilst the Government might have been prepared to resurrect the naval air arm, public opinion would never permit any government to break up, much less abolish, the RAF. He wrote to Salmond early in June:

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1. Cab 16/47, ND 38, 1 June 1923.
2. Air 8/63, ND 7th Meeting, 1 May 1923.
3. Air 8/67, Folio 3, Comments on WO Paper ND 52, Undated.

> I think ... that the very fact that the General Staff are, so to speak, joining forces with the Admiralty, will strengthen the hands of the government in maintaining our integrity and I am certain that we shall win.[1]

At the end of the month the Sub-Committee announced their preliminary findings and proved him right. They adopted the Air Staff scheme for a metropolitan air force of 52 squadrons with a first line establishment of 394 bombers and 204 fighters. At the same time, they decided in favour of retaining the RAF as a separate force, fearing that progress in aerial warfare would not be so great if the WO proposals were adopted.[2]

It would be difficult to quarrel with this last statement, but the decision to embark upon an air expansion of the proposed size and composition must be open to question. The gruesome picture of a London in ruins, the navy and army immobilised, and revolution in the streets, evoked a nightmare which few politicians felt sufficiently knowledgeable to question or sufficiently confident to ignore. It was a nightmare, however, which owed much more to the imagination than to a rational appraisal of the feasibility and possible effects of aerial bombardment. To their credit, the WO took a more realistic view. As a protest, Derby asked that his dissent from the Committee's conclusions be recorded, and gave notice of his decision to raise the matter at Cabinet level.[3] This he did, but the Cabinet endorsed the Committee's recommendations.[4]

Despite its failure, the Army's case had much to commend it, and both Lord Derby and Lord Cavan presented their arguments adroitly. There was, however, as Hankey observed, a certain lack of conviction and urgency in the presentation of their views. Hankey wrote to Balfour just before the verdict was given:

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1. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/143/2, Trenchard to Salmond, 6 June 1923.
2. Cab 16/47, ND 58, Interim Report, 30 June 1923.
3. Ibid.
4. Cab 23/46, Cabinet Meeting 35(23), 9 July 1923.

> Their case was worked up with considerable ability and Cavan was a good witness. I had the feeling, however, that it was rather in the nature of an Aldershot field day and that there was not much sting behind the attack. I do not think there is the slightest chance of the sub committee recommending its adoption. The political objections would be almost overwhelming.[1]

Indeed, such was the weight of these political objections that Derby had himself conceded in front of the Committee that the WO arguments might not be politically acceptable and, in addition to an all-out takeover bid for the Air Force, had put forward proposals whereby the two departments might best cooperate.[2] It was a realistic approach on the part of the WO, but not one designed to inspire unbridled confidence in the success of their declared aim - the abolition of an independent air service.

There was unquestionably too in the minds of the Sub-Committee a deal of scepticism as to the assertion by Cavan that, had the Army been in command in Iraq, it would have made full use of airpower and reduced its ground forces accordingly. The attitude of the WO to the air schemes in both Somaliland and Iraq had hardly created that impression. In neither case had the WO shown a real interest to experiment with aircraft in the policing of colonial areas, relying almost entirely upon the traditional use of large ground forces on the spot and punitive expeditions when the need arose. Chamier, writing in 1921 about Army control in Iraq, had complained that military commanders and their staffs only partially appreciated air potentiality and were unable to "think in aerial terms". He had warned:

> ... trifling with this new weapon of warfare will prove to the users to be reliance on a broken reed, and to the Air Force a blow from which it will take years to recover.[3]

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1. Cab 21/266, Hankey to Balfour, 19 June 1923.
2. Air 8/63, ND 12th Meeting, 12 June 1923.
3. Wing Commander J.A.Chamier, "The use of the Air Force for replacing Military Garrisons", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXVI, 12 January 1921, p.209. Chamier was then working in the Directorate of Operations and Intelligence.

Slessor, commenting on the Army's attitude to airpower many years later, contended that if the RAF had been split up between the older services, it would have suffered the fate of the Tank Corps and the Battle of Britain would have been lost.[1]

Such claims must not be pushed too far, however. Whilst it may be true, as Slessor implies, that strategically the Army would not have paid sufficient attention to the development of aircraft in an independent role, on the tactical level the comparison made with tank development is not a fair one. Unlike the tank, the Army did not look upon airpower as a totally competing arm. Indeed, aircraft were seen as a most valuable and necessary weapon on the battlefield of the future. This was particularly so in these immediate postwar years when the Army authorities showed a great deal of interest in close cooperation between air and land forces.[2] It could be argued, therefore, that had the WO been granted its own air branch - and the prospect was held out by Trenchard in 1919 - the development of airpower as an auxiliary arm on the battlefield might well have been encouraged and a greater measure of cooperation and coordination achieved between ground and air forces than was in fact realised under the dual system which prevailed.

It can be said, too, that in presenting their case to the Salisbury Committee, the WO put the potentialities of strategic bombing into more rational perspective. Furthermore, they anticipated the enormous difficulties created by divided control in time of war, difficulties which did not arise in an Air Staff appreciation in which the Army was relegated to the task of occupying land already won by bombing or the threat of it. The enquiry made it clear, too, that the Air Staff's emphasis upon the power of strategic bombing was at the expense of interservice cooperation. This was evident in remarks made by AVM Sir Geoffrey Salmond in connection with a paper presented by Major General Sir Edmund Ironside on relations between the Navy and the Air

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1. Slessor, op.cit., p.46.
2. See this work, Chapter 4, p.106.

Force.[1] After describing the General as a man who "has never imbibed the true spirit of the air", Sir Geoffrey comments:

> Whatever air officers rise to direct affairs in the future they will thoroughly understand the air arm and this will include the subsidiary problems of Army and Navy cooperation which are really minor questions, easily mastered, compared to the great Air problems that the Science of air involves.[2]

Ironside's paper was also criticised by Trenchard, his proposal that home defence be entrusted to the Civil Service being particularly singled out for comment. Such an idea, he told the Committee, showed more clearly than many pages of argument the necessity for a separate air service and the "danger to vital national interests of allowing it again to be controlled according to the bias and pre-positions of naval and military commanders".[3] Furthermore, a memo from the CAS to his Secretary of State at this time suggests that the Air Staff were determined to deny the Army any say in the type and organisation of aircraft earmarked for cooperation with ground forces. Referring to a WO suggestion that a military staff be maintained at the Air Ministry to assist in the organisation of home defence, Trenchard wrote:

> You must bear in mind that underlying this there is the old controversy on which the WO feels very strongly and which has definitely been decided against them, but in spite of it they have repeatedly tried to lay down the types of machines required for their work, the organisation of the squadron for their work, different types of machines in squadrons, the number of flights to a squadron, and similar questions

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1. The Paper was entitled "Reflections upon Naval Flying". The Sub-Committee had been given to understand that Ironside, then Commandant of the Staff College, had some knowledge of relations between the two Services at sea. See letter from Hankey to Derby, 8 May 1923, Cab 21/266.
2. Air 8/67, Folio 8, 30 May 1923. Author's underlining. Sir Geoffrey Salmond was then Director General of Supply and Research, a fact not without relevance.
3. Cab 21/266, ND(R) 11, 1 June 1923.

> of organisation with which they claim
> they are competent to deal, but which
> we claim are solely within our province.[1]

On the 20th June the Cabinet approved the Air Staff's scheme, seeing it as "a melancholy necessity".[2] The need, Premier Baldwin told the House of Commons, was for a home defence force sufficiently powerful to protect the country against the strongest air force within striking distance.[3] Trenchard wrote to AVM P.W. Game two days later declaring that the Army fight was over, but adding: "They are frightfully sore that their proposals for doing away with us have been turned down so quickly."[4] He was right. The Army was perturbed by the interim report and at once renewed their attack upon the need for so large an independent air force. In a memo towards the end of June, the General Staff argued that war with France alone was neither the most dangerous nor the most likely contingency. If France attacked England, other nations were not likely to stand idly by. Indeed, the General Staff declared that the Great War should not be regarded as exceptional but as "the greatest lesson we have ever had". They foresaw Britain being drawn with all its reserves "into the vortex of a great struggle". In preparing for such a struggle the Air Staff should be incorporated within the General Staff so that future developments could come from one organisation.[5]

At the same time the WO produced a long paper for the Cabinet summing up their arguments against a separate air service. The idea, they warned, quite apart from being uneconomical, would break down in time of war.[6] A few days later the former Secretary of State for War, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans,[7] took up the same

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1. Air 8/67, CAS to Secretary of State for Air, Folio 12, 11 June 1923.
2. Cab 23/45, Cabinet Meeting 32(23), 20 June 1923.
3. Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin*, p.320.
4. Trenchard Papers, II/27/71/1, Trenchard to Game, 22 June 1923. Game was then AOC India.
5. Cab 16/47, ND 57, Memo by General Staff, 26 June 1923.
6. Cab 24/160, CP 296, 28 June 1923.
7. Worthington-Evans was then Postmaster General.He had been Secretary of State for War from February 1921 to October 1922.

theme in a paper to the Cabinet. A separate air force would lead to duplication of forces and division of command. The aim, he contended, should not be to develop the Air Force so that at some time it might be possible to do without the Army, but so to graft aerial progress upon the existing land forces that all the new factors which the new arm brings into play could be tactically used in the most effective and economical manner. The object should be to make the Army stronger by effective use of flying rather than to make an Air Force. Nor could he accept the Air Force doctrine that the air was one and indivisible. He wrote:

> Operations on land and sea must always remain largely different in character. The realms are contiguous but not coincident. It seems a false analogy that seeks to perpetuate a third realm of quasi independent action where the spheres of action do in fact coincide and only differ in dimension.[1]

In reply to these new attacks, the Air Minister complained bitterly about the "prodigious mass of memoranda and oral evidence" that had accumulated over the years on the question of Air Force independence. He made it clear that he had no confidence in the Army to develop the new air weapon along the right lines. Their "nebulous counter proposals" were based on a complete misunderstanding of the principles underlying the Air Staff's case. Criticisms based on an entire misapprehension of the technical factors involved had little real value. If the Air Force were broken up and made a subsidiary of the two older services, then the enthusiasm of British air personnel would be "choked" and the development of British airpower crippled at the very moment when the air menace was acute and the need for air force expansion was urgent.[2]

In an accompanying paper, the Air Staff again warned that air action alone, if on a sufficient scale, might well be capable of forcing a decision in a European war. They found no substance in the WO arguments. A return to the old system could not but result

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1. Cab 24/262, CP 304, 3 July 1923.
2. Cab 24/161, CP 310, 6 July 1923.

in loss of efficiency and much friction. As far as the Navy was concerned, they felt that even a successful bombardment of a few French coastal towns would be a singularly ineffective counter measure to concentrated aerial attacks on London. And why should the Air Force not be maintained to meet contingencies which it is hoped would never occur, for surely the Navy was maintained for such a reason? The French clearly held a diametrically opposite view to that of the British General Staff, for they, it was to be noted, were in favour of maintaining a large standing regular air force.[1]

Three days later, after considerable discussion and continued opposition on the part of the War Minister, the Cabinet agreed that the conclusions of the Salisbury Sub-Committee should be adopted.[2] It was unwise, announced the Prime Minister, to "break up the lessons of experience".[3] For the Air Force, the stringencies of the Geddes era appeared to be at an end.

Once more the WO had lost their case and, once more, they returned immediately to the attack. The Secretary of State for War, Lord Derby, wrote to the Prime Minister the day after the Cabinet's decision. After warning him that the present system was quite unworkable, he turned his attention to a new target - the quality of RAF leadership. He wrote:

> It is no use thinking you can have an Air General Staff unless the quality of the men on it is of a sufficiently high standard to make their decisions acceptable both to the Army and Navy, and such is not the case now. After Trenchard, who is a first class man, there is nobody and what is more, amongst the younger officers there are (*sic*) none who have had sufficient staff education and training to ever warrant their being accepted as experts from a staff point of view.[4]

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1. Cab 24/161, CP 310, 6 July 1923.
2. Cab 23/46, Cabinet Meeting 35(23), 9 July 1923.
3. PM in House of Commons, *Hansard*, (HC5s), Vol.167, Col.1718, 2 August 1923.
4. Derby Papers, WO 137/10, Derby to PM, 10 July 1923.

Derby maintained that he would have difficulty in persuading his own staff officers to assist the Air Force because they would object to working under or alongside some of the men who were then holding high places at the Air Ministry.[1]

The Minister's criticism appears to be rather harsh, particularly in view of some of the very fine officers produced by the RAF in later years.[2] In immediate terms, however, there was indeed a serious shortage of experienced staff officers and, with the sudden expansion of the home defence air force, the Air Ministry was obliged to seek assistance from both the WO and Admiralty. Grey, writing at this time, bluntly described the staff work within the RAF as "rotten", pointing out that even the most senior officers in the Air Force were very young in 1914 and that hardly any of them had had a staff college training. In his view there was a need for men who could put the paper work into an efficient system and only officers of high rank had the necessary experience for the job.[3]

In his letter to the Prime Minister, Derby maintained that the Air Ministry's difficulties lay in the fact that good men were not willing to join the RAF if their career was to be cut short within some seven years at the end of their flying days. He suggested that the answer was to put the provision of personnel under the Army and to insist that every man who joined the Army should have a two year course of flying. In this way, if a man were found to be unfitted for flying, he could go back to his Regiment and enjoy an ordinary run of promotion. He concluded:

> I am rather in despair about it because I believe that the Air Ministry is going to cost us millions which could be saved and in the end it will not be an effective force.[4]

Only a few days earlier this question of promotion prospects

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1. Derby Papers, WO 137/10, Derby to PM, 10 July 1923.
2. Montgomery Hyde claims that Derby's criticism was quite unfounded, and lists a number of senior and junior officers whom he considers to have been of outstanding ability. See op.cit., p.141.
3. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XXV, 24 October 1923, p.414.
4. Derby Papers, WO 137/10, Derby to PM, 10 July 1923.

within the Air Force had been raised by Worthington-Evans, the former War Minister. In a memo to the Cabinet, he had argued that in view of the short length of a flying career - estimated by him as an average of five years - there would never be sufficient room in the higher ranks of the Air Force for their useful employment. On the other hand, the Army could easily absorb such officers. In reply, the CAS had denied that a flying career would be so short and had pointed out, too, the number of short-service commissions available.[1]

For their part, the Government were not prepared to reopen the issue, convinced as they were that an independent Air Force was essential for the development of airpower and the doctrines and skills that should attend it. Later that month, Derby accepted the verdict with seemingly good grace. He wrote in a letter to Salisbury:

> There is a clear cut between the WO and the Air Ministry and as I said, I try to play the game and help them in every way I can. I am sure we shall be able to work amicably ... [2]

Cavan, not a man to show rancour, also proved willing to cooperate with the new and expanding service, at least until circumstances favoured a further attack.[3] In August Trenchard felt able to write to Group Captain P.F.M. Fellowes:

> As you know the government have decided that the integrity of the air service will be maintained. .. I hope to goodness that we may now have a period of peace.[4]

Later in the year, tangible expression was given to this improved relationship. In order to assist the Air Force in its

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1. Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939-1945*, Vol.I, p.53.
2. Derby Papers, WO 137/12, Derby to Salisbury, 23 July 1923.
3. See Trenchard Papers, CII/27/143/2, Trenchard to Salmond, 6 June 1923: "(Cavan) tells me .. if the decision goes against him he will carry on loyally with us in the future."
4. Ibid., II/27/65, Trenchard to Fellowes, 7 August 1923. Fellowes was then AOC Constantinople Wing.

expansion programme, the Army - despite Derby's misgivings - did provide several distinguished General Staff officers to work in the Air Ministry. In a speech at Colchester in October, the Air Minister, citing this as an example of the cooperation existing between the two Services, declared that it would be a calamity to the Air Force if the development of airpower were to isolate the air from the land and sea. He welcomed the help and experience of the older services.[1]

But this better understanding was not to last. The establishment by the Salisbury Sub-Committee of the COS Sub-Committee in which the Air Force attained equal status with the older services, meant though it was to improve defence coordination, served only to intensify inter-service rivalry.[2] Furthermore, with the setting up of the Colwyn Committee, charged with the task of making drastic economies in defence spending, the entire question of Air Force independence was reopened. As the work of the Committee got under way, Mr. C. Bullock, Principal Private Secretary to the Air Minister, wrote to Trenchard to warn him that the Army was likely to use the enquiry as a pretext for further attacks upon the Service. He advised:

> The Secretary of State for War has been so much in the foreground of the attack on our integrity that it seems to me more than probable that he has dished up again the actual criticisms of our internal administration as well as of our general policy made by the General Staff before the National and Imperial Defence Committee in 1923.[3]

In the same month the CAS, concerned about Churchill's sympathetic attitude towards the Army's claims, wrote a strongly worded letter reminding him of the steady growth of the RAF and

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1. *Flight Magazine*, Vol.XV, 25 October 1923, p.658.
2. Lord Ismay, Assistant Secretary to the CID 1925 to 1930, recalls: "For the first few years of their existence the C.O.S. were not exactly a band of brothers. Inter-service cooperation had never come their way, and each of them was intent on fighting for his own corner." *The Memoirs of Lord Ismay*, p.52.
3. Air 19/120, Folio 52, Bullock to CAS, 28 October 1925.

warning him not to be fooled by promises of economy. He continued:

> ... will you say that because a few people with a little knowledge like Worthington-Evans state to you that they can save 4 or 5 million by taking over the air and running it differently you think you have made a mistake? I can quite easily state and substantiate that there is not 3 or 4 million to save in what they propose, and not a penny piece would be saved in doing away with what you call "the hideous duplication and triplication of many services".

The only true way to economy, advised Trenchard, was the substitution of air for some of the Army's duties and responsibilities, and this could never come about without a separate Air Force. The Army, he reminded the Chancellor, had never favoured substitution in Iraq. They gave lip service to the idea of substitution but, given the chance, would only add to their own forces.[1]

In making out his case to the Colwyn Committee, Trenchard was able to make good use of the Air Force record in Iraq, where expenditure had been reduced - so far as the British Government were concerned - from £20 to £4 million per annum in the space of five years. More could be achieved in India too, he maintained, if aircraft were given their rightful place. He admitted that only four squadrons, a total of 48 machines, were provided exclusively for Army cooperation, but pointed out that, in the event of an Expeditionary Force being sent overseas, bombers and fighters would be provided from the home defence forces, where a number of squadrons were on a more mobile basis for this very purpose.[2]

The Army's line of approach, thrashed out at a meeting of the Army Council in mid-November, whilst drawing attention once

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1. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/50, Trenchard to Churchill, October 1925.
2. Ibid., II/22, CAS to Colwyn Committee, Chapter V, 23 December 1925.

again to the duplication of services, showed a marked swing away from former policy. Sensing that the Government would remain in favour of an independent air force for the foreseeable future, the WO trimmed their sails accordingly and, discarding earlier claims to an all-out takeover of the Air Force, decided to press the Committee for the return to the Army of their own military wing in the interests of both economy and efficiency.[1] This decision to accept the existence of a third Service was echoed two days later by Major General Sir John Davidson. Speaking at the Royal United Services Institute, he emphasised the "great moral power of the air in future wars". In the interests of stringency and economy, the coordination, co-relation and cooperation between the Services had to be made very real. He knew the conservative mind in the Army which wanted to get rid of the Air Ministry, but it was "of no value to the Service or the State to live in an imaginary paradise".[2]

Despite the Army's new line of approach, Trenchard was confident that the Committee, like others before it, would rule in favour of an Air Force which was one and indivisible.[3] The important decisions of the Salisbury Committee were still fresh in the mind, and a Cabinet Committee presided over by Lord Birkenhead was at that time considering Air Force expansion with reference to the Home Defence Scheme. Nonetheless, the Air Ministry was anxious to put an end to the claims of the older services once and for all. The Secretary of State for Air wrote privately to Lord Chalmers, imploring that if the Committee did come out in favour of an independent air organisation, the meaning of their decision should be precisely defined for fear that, under a vague definition, the Army and Navy might continue to claim their own arms. Sir Samuel Hoare even went so far as to suggest the form of wording the Committee might use so as to leave the senior services and those who supported their cause in no doubt as to the Government's

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1. WO 163/31, Army Council 348th Meeting, 16 November 1925.
2. *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXXI, 18 November 1925, p.3.
3. Trenchard Papers, II/27/63/2, Trenchard to Ellington, 26 November 1925. AVM Sir Edward Ellington was then AOC India.

determination to maintain an independent Air Service.[1]

Hoare's plea did not fall on stony ground. When the Committee reported towards the end of December 1925, it did so in favour of an independent Air Force which would, in Hoare's very words, "administer a single unified air service which should carry out all air work whether for the Navy, Army or central Air Force". Nor did the findings provide much comfort for the WO. Whilst satisfied that the Army on the whole was prudently and economically administered, the Committee suggested that greater savings could be secured by the extended substitution of airpower as a "substantive arm". Thus the Committee saw no prospect of a positive reduction in air votes below the existing total.[2]

In the New Year Trenchard wrote to Churchill, pleading that there should be no more committees and asking for his help "over the last stile".[3] A few days later, in a letter to the Prime Minister, he stated that he could not carry on any further with this "perpetual uncertainty" over the future of his Force. Furthermore, he pointed out, the effect on the older services was equally as harmful. He wrote:

> How can they settle down to work with us in harmonious cooperation when senior officers are perpetually lecturing and talking about how the air service is going to be broken up and given back to them in a year or two? The present CIGS when he first came into office tried to stop the agitation but could not quell the malcontents even among his own subordinates, owing to the atmosphere of uncertainty.[4]

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1. Air 19/120, Hoare to Lord Chalmers, 18 December 1925. Lord Chalmers was a member of the Colwyn Committee.
2. Air 19/122, Committee on Navy, Army and Air Force Expenditure, 23 December 1925.

   The Committee recommended a reduction of £7½ million in the Naval estimates and £2 million in the Army and Air Force votes.

3. Air 8/78, Folio 56, 28 January 1926.
4. Ibid., Folio 57, 4 February 1926.

At the end of February in a statement to the House of Commons, Baldwin made it clear that the Cabinet had no intention of reopening the question of a separate Air Force and Air Ministry. The Government, he declared, intended to organise imperial defence on the distinct basis of three co-equal Services. The controversy on the subject should cease forthwith.[1]

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1. Air 9/5, Minute 25, 25 February 1926.
Hansard, (HC5s), Vol.192, Col.719.

PART I

THE SURVIVAL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, 1918-1926

Chapter 4

The Nature and Extent of Army-Air Force Cooperation at the Tactical Level December 1920 - December 1925

By the end of 1920, Air Staff belief in the potentiality of strategic bombing was well established and was affecting policy. The aeroplane, as a long range gun, had become in the eyes of the Air Force "the instrument of a new kind of war".[1] Demands made by the General Staff at this time for more Bristol Fighter squadrons at the expense of such types as the DH9A bomber, were firmly resisted on the grounds that "close cooperation with troops is only a small portion of the duties of aircraft". The late war, ran the argument, had shown the limits to which the demands for close cooperation were likely to go and it was therefore easy to make adequate provision. Bombing, on the other hand, when conducted scientifically, would prove of ever increasing power and the limits of this form of air action could not be foreseen.[2] In March the following year an Air Ministry memo added further testimony to the Air Staff's growing faith in the power and importance of the long-distance bomber:

> In attack is our best defence, and we must have powerful air squadrons to carry the war into the enemy's country, to attack his forces in the air and his personnel and establishments on the ground ...[3]

There were, indeed, those in the immediate postwar period who saw the value of close cooperation between air and ground forces and advocated training to that end. Fuller had come out strongly in favour of close air support for armour in his Plan 1919. Liddell Hart had visualised the "land fighting aeroplane" as a means of providing auxiliary firepower in the battle of the future.[4] Likewise Chamier, writing in October 1920, had recognised the need for specially detailed and trained air units

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1. E.Colston Shepherd, *The Air Force of Today*, p.19.
2. Trenchard Papers, CII/1/36, Air Staff Memo, 31 December 1920.
3. Brooke-Popham Papers, IX/5/11, Air Staff Memo, March 1921.
4. Brian Bond, *Liddell Hart: A Study of his Military Thought*, p.24, refers to article in the *United Service Magazine*, April 1920, pp.30-44.

to cooperate with armour and to deal with enemy tanks.[1] Two months later, an article by Lt.Colonel Johnson had stressed the importance of coordination between aircraft and tanks, suggesting that in the future tank columns might be directed entirely from the air.[2] A General Staff paper of October 1921 had taken up the same theme, accepting with enthusiasm the potentiality of aircraft in an anti-tank role. It had informed the Air Ministry:

> Of all existing weapons, aircraft possess the greatest power of speed and radius of action, and are therefore plainly indicated as forming one of the most powerful means for creating successful action against enemy tanks.[3]

In practice, however, training in tactical cooperation between the two services in these years was very meagre, and what cooperation there was was centred around the reconnaissance and artillery spotting which had characterised the early air operations of the Great War. As a tactic, the extensive use of close support aircraft, used to such telling effect in the closing stages of the war, barely survived the Armistice as far as the Air Force were concerned. Although highly successful in halting the German advance of March 1918 and assisting in the counter attack the following August, the employment of low flying aircraft in direct support of infantry and armour was seen as a misuse of airpower by the Air Force purist. Joubert claims that such tactics were particularly disliked by junior officers, who felt it to be a most unrewarding method of air attack. They favoured attacks upon the enemy's homeland, his war factories, and his main lines of communication.[4]

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1. Wing Commander J.A.Chamier, "Aircraft in Cooperation with Infantry", *Army Quarterly*, Vol.I, No.1, October 1920, pp.123-4. Chamier was then working in the Directorate of Operations and Intelligence.
2. Lt.Colonel P.Johnson, "The Use of Tanks in Undeveloped Country", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXVI, 8 December 1920, p.195.
3. Air 5/175, 1A, WO to Air Ministry, 11 October 1921.
4. Joubert, op.cit., p.67.

Independence, then, not cooperation, was to be the keystone of Air Staff policy. They believed with the Editor of *Flight Magazine* that the RAF should be allowed "to develop untrammelled towards its ultimate destiny of being our principal fighting force and our first line of defence".[1] As a government official was to observe some years later:

> Being a new Service, the RAF have felt it necessary to evolve a strategy of their own, and have shut a blind eye (*sic*) to the possibilities of the Air Force as an ancillary arm of the Army.[2]

In contrast, the Army authorities continued to press for a greater measure of cooperation. In May 1922, General Ironside, recently appointed Commandant of the Staff College, Camberley, wrote to the Air Ministry to voice his concern over the lack of instruction on air matters, particularly in connection with small wars.[3] A few months later a conference was held at the college specifically to discuss the organisation of the Air Force for cooperation with other services. Held for the benefit of officer students who, it had been found, "had little or no conception of the tasks that might be assigned to the Air Force in moving warfare", the main part of the discussion centred round the employment of reconnaissance aircraft during a rearguard action. Great interest was also shown, however, in the possibilities of direct intervention by the air force in the tactical phases of the battle.[4] Group Captain P.B. Joubert, who had assisted in drawing up the agenda for the conference, reported back to the Commandant

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1. *Flight Magazine*, Editorial, Vol.XIV, 16 March 1922, p.156.
2. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/613, Sir Archibald Rowlands (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Aircraft Production) to Liddell Hart, 24 August 1941.
3. Trenchard Papers, II/27/99, Ironside to Air Ministry, 6 May 1922. In requesting "an officer of great prestige" to lecture on air matters, Ironside felt it necessary to add, "I can assure the officer carrying out this duty of our entire sympathy so that he may not be oppressed by the idea of any hostility."
4. Air 5/282, Report of Conference, 7 November 1922.

of the RAF Staff College, and an account of the meeting was sent to the Air Ministry to provide them with some idea of the "trend in Army thought".[1]

But at this time, in fact, cooperation between the two services was being put to a more practical test in the crisis over Chanak. Here, combined training proved most successful. In particular, close support exercises in which aircraft, flying low and hugging the contours of the terrain, launched surprise attacks upon the 1st Guards Brigade, opened up "new possibilities of aircraft attack" according to the Colonel Commandant.[2] Lt. General Sir Charles Harington, commenting generally upon the success of the combined operations, remarked: "It is a perfect pleasure to see the way in which all three services work here just like one family and I am sure .. that this friendship will spread throughout all three services and is a far better way of getting efficiency than all the memoranda in the world."[3] But the tactical lessons to be learnt were lost on the Air Staff. Trenchard saw such success as simply a vindication of his belief in an independent service. He wrote to Group Captain Fellowes, AOC Constantinople Wing:

> In this case all the air, whether working with the Army or the Navy, understood one another's views and thought alike and found no difficulty in working together. This is due to the fact that we are one service.[4]

In any case, cooperation of this nature with the opportunities it afforded for the development of army-air coordination at tactical level were to be few and far between. By this time, the fundamental strategies of both services were

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1. Air 5/282, RAF Staff College to Air Ministry, 8 November 1922.
2. Trenchard Papers, II/27/65, Fellowes to Trenchard, 16 May 1923. The Commandant was Col.J.McC.Steele.
3. Ibid., II/27/88, Harington to Trenchard, 2 February 1923. Harington was then GOC-in-C Allied Forces of Occupation, Turkey.
4. Ibid., II/27/65, Trenchard to Fellowes, 14 October 1922.

swiftly moving apart. Writing at this period, P.R.C. Groves argued that the independent striking arm was the first essential, cooperation with sea and land forces being of an auxiliary nature.[1] On the other hand, Major General W.D. Bird reminded the readers of the *Army Quarterly* of the principle that war was best ended through the defeat of the enemy's armed forces and that raiding with the object of striking terror would be of secondary importance until the military objectives of victory in the air and on the sea and land had been achieved.[2]

Such differences were accentuated by the diverging roles of the two services. The Ten Year Rule, assuming as it did that the British Empire would not be engaged in a great war for the next decade, defined the principal functions of both services as the provision of forces for the protection of British territories overseas and for the support of the civil power at home. Whilst the General Staff never lost faith in the importance of the Army in any future continental conflict, they officially recognised the nature of their postwar role. In his address at the Staff Exercises held in the autumn of 1922, the CIGS made it clear that the Army's policy, as laid down by the Government, was to train for a small war.[3] The Air Ministry, on the other hand, saw the Air Force as the country's first line of defence in a European conflict. An Air Ministry memo of January 1923 firmly pointed out that in the event of a great war the primary function of the RAF had to be the attainment of air superiority without which "it may be impossible to land the Army on the enemy's shores". Aircraft designed for such a purpose, however, were not of a suitable type with which to assist the Army in a minor war. Conversely, it was more than doubtful whether types designed in the first instance for close cooperation with the Army would be of much value for the

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1. Brigadier General P.R.C.Groves, *Our Future in the Air*, (pub.July 1922), p.13.
2. Major General W.D.Bird, "Some Speculations on Aerial Strategy", *Army Quarterly*, Vol.IV, No.2, July 1922, p.249.
3. Trenchard Papers, CII/19/1, Air Staff Notes, 31 January 1923.

type of aerial action with which a great war would probably start. Thus, concluded the memo, in those types of war in which the Army was most likely to be engaged it might well be found that the best assistance to the Army might be afforded less by specialised close support aircraft than by bombing and aerial gunfire.[1]

Remarks on this memo by Air Commodore Brooke-Popham a week later throw further light on Air Staff thinking at this time. The requirements for the Army, he pointed out, would have to be balanced by the Air Staff against other needs of which those for direct action against the enemy would presumably be the most important.[2]

This emphasis upon the Air Force's independent role, inevitable in the eyes of an Air Ministry which saw its primary task as the defence of the homeland against massive air attack, was destined to push the needs of the Army further and further into the background. A General Staff paper to the Air Ministry at this time, drawn up following an Army conference on the subject of combined training, remarked: "An alarming feature of the past training season and of the various staff exercises was the ignorance displayed as to the methods of cooperation between the RAF and the Army." It was vital for the Army, the paper argued, that in the first place the RAF should know military requirements, methods and formations, and that, in the second place, Army commanders and troops should know what the air means to them both as an ally and an enemy. It suggested that an Inter-Departmental Committee of Directors be made permanent and meet when necessary to consider questions of tactics and training, particularly with regard to the use of aircraft against ground targets in hilly terrain. It recommended, too, the appointment of an RAF instructor at Camberley and an Army instructor at the RAF Staff College, Andover. It urged also that an Air Force staff officer be attached to the HQ Staff at Aldershot, Salisbury and the Eastern Command to assist in training and the making of policy, and that an Air

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1. Air 5/282, 10A, Air Ministry Memorandum, 1 January 1923.
2. Ibid., Remarks by Brooke-Popham, 8 January 1923. Brooke-Popham was then Commandant, RAF Staff College.

Officer be made available at the other Commands to advise the GOC-in-C on air matters when necessary.

In the Air Force itself, the General Staff felt that higher commanders must be kept fully aware of the problems facing the Army and that junior ranks who were likely in any way to cooperate with ground forces should have a clear and definite knowledge of Army formations. The paper continued:

> It is understood that the Air Ministry do not at present regard Army cooperation work as a specialised branch of Air Force work. The General Staff are strongly of the opinion that satisfactory results are unlikely to be reached unless this work is definitely recognised as a specialised branch and a certificate given for it.[1]

As far as aircraft for the Army Commands were concerned, the General Staff considered that in peace time the minimum number of squadrons attached to the Army for training purposes should be two for Aldershot; one for the Southern and Eastern Commands; and, for the Northern, Scottish and Western Commands, the call on a flight when required. It was also considered necessary to have one scout squadron at the Army Air School, a flight at Cologne, and two flights with the Air Defence Brigade at Aldershot. In addition, maintained the General Staff, the Air Ministry should make arrangements so that aircraft could be present at every artillery practice camp in order to carry out shoots in cooperation with army batteries.[2]

Despatched to the Air Ministry on the 17th January, the paper was studied by the DTSD, Air Commodore T.C.R. Higgins. His note on the recommendation that certain RAF personnel should have a thorough knowledge of Army affairs is illuminating. It reads:

> Agree, but they must not study detail too much, after all Army cooperation is only one of many branches of Air work and as time goes on its importance from an air point of view may decrease.[3]

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1. Air 5/280, 1a, WO to CAS, 17 January 1923.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 3a, 18 January 1923.

In the circumstances, Higgins regarded the number of cooperation squadrons required as a "tall order". The Air Force already had a school specialising in Army cooperation and sixty officers were trained each year, twenty of them from the Army. In any case, the need for such cooperation was greatly dependent upon whether the Air Ministry's preparations for war were to be based on the policy and strategy of the Army or the Air Force.[1] The DTSD was not alone in holding such views. As one Air Force officer was later to point out, the senior Army officers of this time had their brains "clogged with two dimensional instincts and traditions". It could not be expected that responsible Army leaders could devise new and hitherto unheard of methods of employing a novel weapon when they wanted to use such a weapon for their own purposes.[2]

At the end of the month, the Air Staff made their own observations on the type of cooperation likely to be required between the Air Force and the Army in any future war. Commenting upon the fact that the General Staff were training for a small, mobile war, the Air Staff pointed out that, unlike the Army, the Air Force was not able to adapt itself to the requirements of major warfare without great loss of time and efficiency. Thus whilst air policy would cover the needs of a small war, its primary concern would be training for a major conflict in which the nation would be threatened by air attack. Thus it had to be fully understood that air action as a whole had to be of an independent nature, i.e., the bombing of military targets behind the enemy's lines, the destruction of his factories and organisation, and the creating of terror among his civil population. Such action would indirectly assist the ground troops who might ultimately have to occupy the enemy's territory until peace terms had been concluded. The paper asserted:

> The functions of the Air Force are not concerned solely with assisting the other services, nor are they limited to aerial

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1. Air 5/280, 3a, 18 January 1923.
2. Air Commodore L.E.O.Charlton, *War From the Air*, p.47.

> combat; they possess the power of striking a blow which may be far reaching before the forces on land come into collision.[1]

Thus when a conference between the two Ministries was held in February 1923 to discuss this whole matter of cooperation, both departments had already made their positions abundantly clear. In warfare, the WO saw the air forces as providing an important but auxiliary service, trained specifically to meet the needs of ground forces in a tactical support role as well as for reconnaissance and artillery spotting; the Air Ministry saw the Air Force primarily as an independent striking force not only in its deterrent role, but also in its support of the Army in the field.

The results of the Conference proved of little value or comfort to the WO. The fundamental strategies of both services were shown to be poles apart. Whilst the CIGS pointed out that the Army was obliged to train for a small war because it had small numbers and little money, the CAS envisaged a battle of the future in which, instead of big guns bombarding to a depth of ten miles or so, there would be a large number of squadrons bombing to a depth of some 150 miles. This long distance bombing, he claimed, would prevent the supplies, ammunition and reinforcements from getting through and the enemy's army would therefore "come to a standstill". Arguing from this hypothesis, he concluded that in any future war there would be less machines needed for artillery cooperation and more for long distance bombing.

As for the specific requirements sought by the General Staff, these were not met, modest though they were. Trenchard regretted that no senior officer could be spared as an instructor at Camberley and that only one or two lectures could be provided. As far as a military instructor at the RAF Staff College was concerned, it was felt that there was not sufficient work to provide full employment but that, again, three or four lectures

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1. Air 9/5, No.16, Minute 2, Air Staff Paper on the type of cooperation likely to be required in a future war, 31 January 1923.

could be arranged. At the operational level, Trenchard pointed out that officers at present with commands were not sufficiently experienced to give opinions on matters of strategy and policy. Certain officers could be made available, however, for staff exercises.

Likewise on the question of squadron allocation for training with commands, the Air Ministry were in no position to meet the Army's requirements. Only one squadron could be provided in the immediate future. This would be stationed at Andover and would be shared by the Aldershot, Southern and Eastern Commands.[1] Nor could the Air Staff undertake to provide aircraft at every artillery practice camp. Though they accepted the idea in principle, they pointed to difficulties over suitable landing grounds.[2]

There were those in the Army who were deeply concerned at the Air Staff's apparent lack of interest in matters relating to Army-Air cooperation. It was, to be sure, an attitude hardly in keeping with the undertaking given by the Government at the formation of the RAF and re-affirmed a year later by the CAS in his appraisal of the Air Force's future role. Ironside for one was bitterly disappointed at the inability of the Air Ministry to provide a full-time instructor at Camberley to lecture on matters of gunnery, reconnaissance and general liaison. "What we want," he wrote to the DSD, Major General C.F. Romer, "is continuous air instruction all through our training. You cannot separate air action from military action any more than you can separate artillery. .. Trenchard is apparently frightened of the bigger air views being misrepresented. This is not what we want an Air instructor for."[3]

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1. The Army's requirements had not been fully met by the end of 1924. By November of that year the RAF had four Army Cooperation Squadrons permanently allotted to the Eastern and Southern Commands, Aldershot, and the Army Air School. See Air 19/107, CAS to Secretary of State for Air, 12 November 1924.
2. Air 5/280, 9a, Minutes and Conclusions of a Conference between WO and Air Ministry, 13 February 1923.
3. Ibid., 22a, Copy of letter, Ironside to Romer, 28 February 1923.

Romer wrote to the CAS a few days later: "Tiny and I are very keen that our staff college students should never for a moment cease to remember the air when they are considering any operations."[1]

Like concern was felt about the meagre tactical support likely to be provided because of the Air Ministry's undue emphasis upon the long distance bomber. In May, a General Staff memo to the Salisbury Committee sought a definite guarantee that aircraft earmarked for the Field Force - a total of eight squadrons for the 1st and 2nd echelons - would be "mobilizable automatically in whole or part *pari passu* with that force".[2] The following month a further memo renewed fears that, in a future war, the Air Staff would concentrate their efforts against distant objectives whilst a decisive battle requiring close air support was being fought on the ground. The memo considered that it should be expressly laid down that once mobilisation was ordered, the Air Ministry should have no responsibility with regard to any theatre in which the Army was operating other than for the provision of material and personnel, whether the war be on a minor or major scale. Underlying this proposal was an understandable fear that a lack of precise definition as to the responsibilities of each service in the battle zone might lead to serious confusion and disagreement at commander level. The memo pointed out that according to the RAF Manual of Operations, such targets as billets, enemy concentration areas, and road and rail junctions and bridges were among the objectives to be selected by the military commander yet, in the same manual, such targets were listed among the objectives of independent air operations. There was therefore an "undefined area" which might well result in a breakdown of that unity of command which was so essential in battle.[3]

On receipt of this memo, Mr. Bullock, confusing tactics with strategy, dismissed this last point as being an attempt by the

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1. Air 5/280, 22a, Romer to CAS, 1 March 1923.
2. Cab 16/47, ND 34, 16 May 1923.
3. Ibid., ND 40, Memo by Secretary of State for War, 8 June 1923.

Army to raise the bogey that there could be no dividing line where targets become air and cease to be military objectives. "It is this lack of capacity to visualise the future of the air arm," he wrote to Trenchard, "which necessitates the existence of the Air Staff." The General Staff were simply jealous.[1]

Later that month another General Staff paper outlined the Army's air requirements at home and overseas. It assessed the present needs as no less than 30 squadrons, 25 of which should be fighters. In time of war, the total need at the outset was seen as 57 squadrons with once again a large preponderance of fighter aircraft. As far as the Expeditionary Force was concerned, the memo considered that a total of eight squadrons would be required for actual cooperation with a force of six divisions and that these squadrons should be allotted permanently to the Army for training purposes.[2]

When the matter was discussed at the first meeting of the COS Sub-Committee the following month, however, no decision was reached as to the allocation of fighters and bombers to the Army. The CAS considered it premature to discuss the establishment of such units. The need, he argued, was for a "flexible agreement" whereby a certain number of home defence squadrons was earmarked for service with the army overseas should they not be required for their assigned purpose. In reply, the CIGS, whose main interest lay, in fact, with the Army's imperial role,[3] conceded that in the event of a war with a first class European power, the Expeditionary Force would at first be confined to these islands and that, during that period, he would be content with the two Army Cooperation Squadrons and the three squadrons designated as reserves. Nor, despite the matter of training, did

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1. Trenchard Papers, CII/19/1, Minute 14, Bullock to CAS, 11 June 1923.
2. Cab 53/12, COS Paper 1, 27 June 1923.
3. See Cab 53/1, COS 6th Meeting, 8 January 1924, Memo by CIGS on Consideration of Strategic Problems: "We must concentrate on our Imperial defence. There is no need to try and justify our existence by wasting our time and energies in the compilation of elaborate plans for war against hypothetical enemies .."

he consider that the number of fighter and bomber squadrons allotted to the Army was of pressing importance since such squadrons were to some extent detached from the Army and would be given specific orders by the C-in-C.[1]

Thus at this early stage no provision was made for the attachment of certain bomber and fighter squadrons to army units for coordination in tactical operations. The Air Staff ignored the substantial air requirements to which the General Staff laid claim. Furthermore, assisted in their attitude by an over-conciliatory Cavan, they would assign no aircraft on a permanent or even temporary basis for training in tactical support.

Later that month, therefore, when the Air Staff came to hammer out the composition of their new expansion programme of 52 squadrons, their findings were narrowly based upon a limited fighter defence and a massive counter-offensive based on long range bombers. No thought was given to Army needs. Indeed, in a series of conferences held at the Air Ministry, Trenchard pointed out that the Army could only defeat the enemy's land forces, whereas the Air Force had as its aim the defeat of the enemy nation. Thus the RAF had to avoid allowing its policy to be affected by that of another service. Air Force policy and strategy were totally different from those of the Army. In his opinion any war with France would be a "bombing duel" in which France would probably squeal first. The nation that could stand being bombed the longest would win in the end.

AVM P.W. Game, recalled from India to advise on the RAF expansion programme, supported his Chief. Bombing, he maintained, provided positive results.[2] The DCAS, Air Commodore J.M. Steel, took the same line and urged the importance of continuity in attack. Bombing should be carried out ceaselessly by day and by night so that damage caused could not be repaired.[3] Given such views, it is hardly surprising that a ratio between bombers and fighters of 3 to 1 was recommended to the CID and later approved

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1. Cab 53/1, COS 1st Meeting, 17 July 1923.
2. Air 2/1267, Meeting held on 19 July 1923.
3. Ibid., 25 July 1923.

by the Cabinet.[1]

In fact, however, this ratio and the theory of the knock-out-blow which played so large a part in its determination, had no scientific basis. Indeed, it was this very lack of certainty which afforded advocates of strategic bombing and nervous politicians alike the opportunity to give free rein to their imagination.

Such claims did not go unopposed however. Cavan, as recorded earlier, questioned the validity of the Air Staff's figures both as to the destructive power of the bomb and the strength of French airpower which could be ranged against England.[2] The Editor of *The Aeroplane* also had his feet more firmly on the ground. After stressing the importance of cooperation with the Army, one of the Air Force's activities which was "least considered by the great majority of the officers", he warned against "Air Bogeys". Referring to prophecies of London being devastated in a single night, he wrote:

> The people who talk and write nonsense of that sort always remind one of the fat boy in *Pickwick* whose object in life was to make people's flesh creep. The fact is that they merely defeat their own object.[3]

This growing tendency on the part of the Air Ministry to take a blinkered view of their future strategy - however politically justified by lack of funds - was also criticised by Army officers, both senior and junior. Generals Ironside and Chetwode spoke out against Air policy in a lecture at Camberley. The Air Force, claimed General Sir Edmund Ironside, appeared to think only of the offensive. They needed to pay more attention to defensive measures, especially anti-aircraft units. Lt.General Sir Philip Chetwode, GOC-in-C Aldershot Command, resurrected the Wilson line.

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1. Denis Richards claims that this ratio would have been 4-1 had it not been for the arguments put forward by the most junior member present, Squadron Leader Charles Portal. See *Portal of Hungerford*, pp.89-90.
2. This work, p.87.
3. *The Aeroplane*, Vol.XXV, 26 September 1923, p.305, and 26 December 1923, p.598.

He considered that the Air Force could only win a war by bombing women and children. The proper task remained the support of the Army in order to defeat the enemy's forces in the field.[1] Later, a young engineer, writing in the *Army Quarterly*, advised against "doctrines based upon imagination, and not upon facts". There were those who would have the country believe that armies were already obsolete but, in fact, there were no grounds at that time for supposing that wars could be won by aircraft alone.[2]

Stressed too, at this time, was the specialist nature of Army cooperation work. Finding troops on the ground, recognising what they were, and deciding what they were doing, required a "very highly specialised education". For this reason, it was argued, RAF officers should be allocated permanently to Army cooperation units.[3] Wing Commander C.H.B. Blount, in a paper given at the RAF Staff College in 1925, likewise referred to the "vast store of military knowledge" with which a pilot in an Army Cooperation Squadron had to become familiar. He warned: "Should a military wing be found necessary, it will be due to lack of military knowledge of RAF personnel engaged in Army Cooperation."[4]

One lasting result of this emphasis upon independent action and the need to provide a large bomber force as a deterrent against attack, was the theory of the all-purpose aircraft. During the late war there had been a strong body of opinion against specialisation. It had been felt that too many types not only

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1. Trenchard Papers, II/27/28, Marson to CAS, 17 December 1923. In his account of the lectures, Marson writes, "He (Brooke-Popham) feels that all the good liaison work between Ironside and himself and their respective students was nullified by the finish, and particularly by the nature and manner of General Chetwode's speech."
   Air Commodore H.R.M. Brooke-Popham was Commandant of the RAF Staff College.
2. Captain McA.Hogg, RE, "Aeroplanes in Future Warfare", *Army Quarterly*, Vol.IX, No.1, October 1924, p.104.
3. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XXV, 10 October 1923, p.378.
4. Wing Commander C.H.B. Blount, "The Development of Army Cooperation since 1918", 4th Course of the RAF Staff College, 1925-6. Available at Adastral Library, Adastral House, London.

meant that smaller numbers of aircraft would be produced, but that by reducing flexibility, it would prevent concentration of attack upon the most important objectives.[1]

After the war such views persisted within the Air Staff. In 1920 a letter from Wing Commander Fellowes extolling the virtues of the RE8 over those of the DH9 and DH9A bombers, brought a sharp rebuke from the DOI, Air Commodore J.M. Steel. In a letter to Trenchard, Wing Commander J.A. Chamier, writing on behalf of Steel, complained that Fellowes only looked at one side of the question. It was not possible to supply ideal machines for each individual job. Under the prevailing conditions a very few squadrons had to do the whole work of a large country. "Apart from this," he continued, ".. it would be an impossible situation if the outbreak of a war found the Air Force with regard to a large number of its squadrons armed with slow, short range and obsolete types of machines unsuitable to take any part in European warfare."[2]

An even stronger denunciation of aircraft specialisation came in February 1924. An Air Ministry reply to the Air Attaché at Washington concerning an "Attack Aviation group" within the US Army Air Service (a unit of ground-attack aircraft) left the Attaché in no doubt as to the Air Staff's views on such units:

> I am to say that the policy of the Americans is regarded as quite unsuited to the needs of this country and that it would be impossible to produce a similar organisation without starving far more important branches of the RAF.

The idea of armouring aircraft for use in the RAF, added the reply, had been definitely abandoned and although it was probable that extensive use would be made of low flying attacks against ground targets in the future, the ordinary service types of machines would be used for that work.[3]

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1. Webster and Frankland, op.cit., p.56.
2. Trenchard Papers, II/27/144/2, Chamier to CAS, 13 October 1920. Fellowes was then AOC Mesopotamian Wing.
3. Air 9/6, Item 14 in Note by Plans on Ground-Attack Aircraft, 28 February 1935, refers.

In view of such dogmatism, it is worthy of note that the United States was not the only nation to retain attack aviation as a separate branch. Towards the end of the war the Germans had arrived at a similar conclusion. They considered that the tactics as well as the techniques of executing ground attacks differed so much from other air operations that a separate organisation and tactical training were necessary.[1]

In the eyes of the British Air Staff, however, such specialisation was a luxury which only a few Air Powers could afford. It was felt that it was only be reducing the number of specialist aircraft that "an air effort adequate for the defence of this country and of the Empire could be achieved".[2] Airpower, it could be argued, had to be flexible and multi-purpose. In the case of the RAF, however, this stubborn reluctance to consider any form of specialisation was born of an inordinate and, at this stage, unfounded faith in the power of the long-range bomber. It was a faith shared by influential observers outside of Air Force circles. In particular, the publication in 1925 of Liddell Hart's *Paris, or the Future of War*, claiming that the true object of war was the morale of the enemy nation, and depicting as it did the horrific effects of sustained bombing, added welcome weight to Air Staff doctrine. AVM Brooke-Popham, referring to this work, wrote to Marson at this time, "There is nothing novel in it to us but it is interesting to see other people thinking on the same lines."[3]

But the case for greater tactical cooperation between the two services did not go by default. In July of that year an Editorial in the *Army Quarterly* played down the effects of strategic bombing and stressed the inter-dependence of Army and Air tactics, "a fact which many soldiers and airmen are sometimes too much inclinded to forget".[4] Two months later the Editor of

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1. William C. Sherman, *Air Warfare*, p.163.
2. Lord Swinton, *I Remember*, p.141.
3. Trenchard Papers, II/27/28, Brooke-Popham to Marson, 17 July 1925.
4. *Army Quarterly*, Editorial, Vol.X, No.2, 2 July 1925, p.228.

The Aeroplane questioned the validity of Air Staff policy. He wrote:

> When one remembers how much trench straffing was done during the war and how much more ground straffing (or contour fighting) is likely to be done in the future, because in the next war we shall have to engage in open fighting, it is rather peculiar that so little attention has been given to special ground straffing aeroplanes either in offence or defence.[1]

Earlier that year, the same journal had taken the Air Ministry to task for the "lamentable lack of progress in aircraft design". It was their duty, an Editorial had claimed, to see that the fighting men were provided with adequate weapons, yet our single-seater fighters were 20 to 40 miles an hour slower than those of certain foreign Powers, and our general purpose reconnaissance-cum-bomber-cum artillery machines were hardly any better.[2]

This is not to suggest that there was no training in close support tactics. Indeed, according to one RAF Officer who served in Army Cooperation at this time, a series of exercises, carried out in BAOR in the autumn of 1924, proved of particular value in this respect. He recalls that during these exercises, which had been arranged at the request of the Army authorities, a flight of aircraft had carried out a successful low-flying attack upon an Infantry Brigade, pelting the men and wagons with tennis balls before a shot could be fired.[3] Even when held, such exercises were not always appreciated. In September 1925, for example, the CIGS himself wrote to Trenchard to protest about the "very low flying of your boys". He complained that in recent manoeuvres he had seen aircraft flying at a height of 25 to 30 feet and he

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1. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XXIX, No.14, 30 September 1925, p.387.
2. Ibid., Vol.XXVIII, No.5, 4 February 1925, p.93.
3. Group Captain (Retd.) J.A.G. Haslam. Interviewed by author, 15 March 1977. Haslam commanded the Signal Cooperation Flight, 1922-24. The Flight was based at Biggin Hill but for most of his command the unit was mobile and, apart from the visit to BAOR, toured the Northern and Scottish Commands.

thought that this was wrong teaching for his men.[1]

Later that year strong pleas for a separate Army air arm were renewed. Liddell Hart, reporting on Army manoeuvres during the year, voiced the opinion that, in matters of air support, the best cooperation between the two services was no substitute for a military air arm. The Army, he claimed, should provide an air arm from its own resources over which it would have complete control.[2] The Editor of *The Aeroplane*, commenting upon the ground straffing, wrote:

> It was a very pretty exhibition, but it showed one for the first time how extraordinarily ineffective ground straffing must be when attempted with single-seat fighters of the existing type.[3]

The following month the whole question of inter-service training was raised by Lt.Colonel F.A. Pile. Writing about the same manoeuvres, he complained that in any future war squadrons allocated for control by the GOC of the ground troops would lack the required training. The allotment of bomber objectives, he maintained, was as difficult and as skilled a task as the allotment of bombardment tasks to the artillery. In any future war the GOC would be obliged to leave the selection of objectives to be bombed to his Air Force advisor because he had received no practice in selecting them in peace time. He complained, too, that no genuine attempt at ground reconnaissance had been made. In his opinion the need for a greater understanding between airmen and soldiers was more essential at that time, when the bulk of RAF officers were not soldiers and when the tank battle was likely to range over far wider areas than in the past. The Air Force, he claimed, was too much inclined to regard Army cooperation as merely a matter of reconnaissance and artillery

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1. Trenchard Papers, II/27/28, Cavan to Trenchard, 8 September 1925.
2. *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXX, 1925, p.655. Liddell Hart stressed, however, that the RAF had an independent role of almost incalculable importance.
3. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XXIX, 30 September 1925, p.387.

spotting. Adequate practice was also required, however, for the role of close support aircraft. If squadrons could not be withdrawn from their watch aloft for this purpose, then the Army should have its own low-flying squadrons. In his view the whole question of the intervention of aircraft in the ground battle required serious consideration. At present there was no practice in this form of cooperation despite the fact that aircraft were capable of knocking out tanks and anti-tank guns. He concluded:

> It is of course amazingly difficult to cooperate effectively even with other arms of the same service, but for different services to hope to cooperate on the field of battle without a great deal of previous training and experiment seems somewhat futile.[1]

General Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd, GOC 1st Division, speaking in November 1925, argued that whilst most soldiers would agree that the Air Ministry had come to stay, the Air Staff should "make some modification in their present line of action". They should give the Army more control over Army Cooperation Squadrons, and the overlapping of services should be avoided. During the last year, he said, he had had a whole squadron working in his division and he had constantly felt that his task would have been easier if that squadron had been entirely under his control. At the same meeting, Lt.General Sir Noel Birch, Master General of the Ordnance, hinted that an Army Wing for Christmas would be a very acceptable gift.[2]

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1. Lt.Colonel F.A.Pile, "The Army's Air Needs", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXI, 1926, pp.725-7. Pile was then on the staff of the Territorial Army Air Defence Formations.

   In the October issue of *The Edinburgh Review*, the former CAS, Major General Sir Frederick Sykes, also criticised the Air Ministry, alleging that the senior services were badly served in their tactical air requirements. See report of article in the *Army Quarterly*, Vol.XI, No.2, 2 January 1926, pp.229-30.
2. Discussion following lecture at the RUSI, 18 November 1925. See *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXI, 1926, pp.15-18.

The following month, Ironside, in a course of lectures on land warfare at University College, London, complained that the Army suffered the grave disability of being dependent on another service altogether for their reconnaissance and artillery observation. The observer needed to be able to form military judgements from what he saw as to the best line of action. It was perhaps only natural that in the event of a future war the Air Ministry, however well intentioned they might be, would use their best men for what was in their eyes the main purpose, and the Army would be left without eyes. The maintenance of these two separate services was checking the proper evolution of the Army. As a result, the two services were drawing apart from each other rather than together.[1]

This "drawing apart" was not confined, in fact, to the tactical level. In the wider issue of home defence, one of the most pressing problems of the day, what plans emerged for cooperation and coordination between the two services were frail in the extreme. As early as May 1921, Trenchard had made out a case for the transfer from the WO to the Air Ministry of all matters relating to the air defence of Great Britain. The arrangements then existing, he had argued, provided an excellent illustration of the "over subordination" of the air arm to the military service. The organisation required to meet air attack was a highly complicated one, necessitating considerable expert and technical knowledge. Such knowledge could only be acquired by a close study of aerial matters. Thus the organisation and disposition of the home defence forces must be based on the aerial resources which an enemy was likely to employ and of which the Air Staff were the only competent judges.[2]

This take-over attempt was vigorously opposed by the General Staff, but the Air Staff's case was upheld by the Balfour enquiry. In the matter of air defence, Balfour had advised, the Army and

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1. Ironside lecturing on land warfare, 3 December 1925. See *The Aeroplane*, Vol.XXIX, 9 December 1925, p.674. Major General Sir Edmund Ironside was then Commandant, Staff College, Camberley.
2. Cab 5/4, CID Paper 140-C, 27 May 1921.

Navy should play a "secondary role".[1] In the Spring of 1922 the Cabinet approved the transfer of responsibility. It was, at this stage, a transfer in name only. The extensive defence system in operation at the end of the war had been completely disbanded by 1920 and a completely new organisation was required.

The Army Council discussed the matter at the end of May 1922[2] and, in a letter to the CID early in July, sought clarification as to the line of demarcation to be drawn between the operational responsibilities of the two services. They considered that the responsibility for training, maintaining and controlling the ground forces, together with the design and provision of equipment, should be borne by the WO "in consultation with the Air Ministry". At ground level, they claimed that the passive means of defence - such as guns, searchlights and sound locators - should be under the immediate command of a military officer who would receive general directions from the AOC as to the conduct of the defence operations. The WO suggested, too, that the general policy of AA defence should be "directed" through a sub-committee established on the analogy of the Home Ports Defence Committee and entitled "The Sub-Committee for the AA Defence of the United Kingdom".[3]

For their part, the Air Ministry was in no way anxious to become burdened with responsibility for the ground forces. They placed little reliance upon such static measures of defence, regarding the ability to respond in kind as the best means of deterring a would-be attacker. In their reply to the WO, therefore, they accepted the proposals made concerning the direction of the passive defence measures, pointing out that similar proposals had in fact been made earlier by the Air Staff themselves. They emphasised, however, that the operational control of the ground defences would be exercised by an AOC responsible to the Air Ministry. This officer would control these units through the senior Army officers in immediate command, in precisely the same way as the GOC of an Expeditionary Force

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1. Cab 5/4, CID Paper 149-C, 26 July 1921.
2. WO 163/28, Army Council 303rd Meeting, 30 May 1922.
3. Cab 4/8, CID Paper 351-B, 4 July 1922.

controlled through a senior Air Force officer those air squadrons allotted for Army cooperation.

The suggestion that a new sub-committee of the CID be formed to direct policy was opposed, however, by the Air Ministry. Concerned lest their own authority might be undermined thereby, they declared that any questions which might arise concerning the respective spheres of the two departments could be adequately dealt with by the Defence Sub-Committee of the CID.[1] A compromise solution to this particular question was put forward by the CID Secretary, Sir Maurice Hankey. He suggested that instead of creating a new sub-committee, the wishes of the Army Council could be adequately met and the coordination of all aspects of home defence effectively ensured if the scope of the Home Ports Defence Committee were widened so as to enable it to deal with all questions appertaining to home defence. This committee, renamed "The Home Defence Committee", would remain a consultative body in deference to the wishes of the Air Ministry.[2]

In December the WO accepted this proposal and a few days later the CID made the necessary recommendations.[3] In April the following year a Committee under the joint chairmanship of Air Commodore Steel and Colonel W. Bartholomew, formed to draw up a defence plan for the South-East of England, warned that no adequate defence system could be provided before 1925.[4] That same year the Salisbury Committee rejected a claim by the WO that "Home Defence is a normal problem of modern warfare well within the competence of the General Staff".[5] An independent Air Force was required, the Committee concluded, to deal with the distinct and specialised tasks associated with home defence against aerial attack.[6] In 1924 a Committee under Major General Romer assigned - not without some difficulty - the administrative duties to be shared by the two departments, and early the following year

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1. Cab 4/8, CID Paper 356-B, 19 July 1922.
2. Ibid., 365-B, 18 October 1922.
3. Ibid., 378-B, 5 December 1922, and Cab 2/3 CID 168th Meeting, 14 December 1922.
4. General Sir Frederick Pile, *Ack-Ack*, p.52.
5. Cab 16/47, ND 40, 8 June 1923.
6. Ibid., ND 58, 30 June 1923.

Air Marshal Sir John Salmond was appointed to command the whole Air Defence of Great Britain.[1]

Thus was established a compromise system of dual control which contained the seeds of future trouble. The WO were to prove reluctant to provide money for a defence system for which they were not ultimately responsible; the Air Ministry were to prove reluctant to provide money for a defence system in which they had little faith. Ashmore was to write later:

> The ground forces have two masters pulling in opposite directions; the RAF only want them efficient, the War Office only want them cheap.[2]

Given such a situation there was little hope that the development of air and land responsibilities would go hand in hand. Indeed, within a few years the two arms of defence were "no longer in step".[3]

Nor was a larger measure of success obtained in the matter of coastal defence, a question which was destined to loom large in the wider issue of imperial protection. In a letter to the CID in June 1921, the WO clearly spelt out their views concerning the defence of ports at home and overseas. They argued that the object of any determined attack upon a port was the ultimate capture of that port in order that its use might be denied the enemy or that it might be used as a base for invading troops. As capture could only be accomplished by the landing of an enemy force, and as this force could only be opposed by troops, the Army Council claimed that the supreme commander at every defended port must be a soldier.[4]

To the Air Ministry such an argument was illogical. In a letter to the CID a few days later, they maintained that in the great majority of cases an attack upon a port would never develop into a serious attempt to capture the fortress itself, but would be confined to sea or air bombardment. In such cases there was no

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1. Pile, op.cit., p.53.
2. Major General E.B.Ashmore, *Air Defence*, p.134.
3. Pile, op.cit., p.61.
4. Cab 4/7, CID Paper 272-B, 7 June 1921.

reason why the commander should be a soldier. For their part, they favoured a formula whereby anyone of the three service commanders could have a "predominating voice", the choice to depend upon the nature of the attack to be repelled.[1]

It was not until a meeting of the CID in February 1923 that the matter was again discussed. The Committee approved of the Air Ministry's formula, but were unable to agree as to which service should provide a commander in the first instance. The matter was referred to an inter-departmental committee consisting of the Chiefs of Staff.[2] The Committee met in December when it was agreed that, for the present, the fortress commander should be a military officer since the military garrison was the only force which was available at all times. However, the Committee ruled that if, because of scientific or other developments, the main burden of defence in any particular fortress came to fall on either the Navy or the Air Force, the appointment of the commander would be decided "on the merits of the case".[3]

So loose were the terms of this agreement that it really counted for little when the appointment of a commander was in dispute. It was to count for even less when the means of defence themselves were in contention, as was to be the case in the protracted dispute over the defence of Singapore. It was, in effect, but another compromise which, as far as the fighting services were concerned, depended in the last resort upon the will to cooperate - a commodity which was in very short supply for much of the period under review.

Indeed, where a measure of cooperation was favoured by one department, as in the case of the amalgamation of common services, the intentions were hostile not conciliatory. As noted earlier, from mid 1919 the WO lost no opportunity of bringing to the Government's notice the costly duplication made by the Air Ministry in certain administrative branches.[4] In February 1922

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1. Cab 4/7, CID Paper 275-B, 16 June 1921.
2. Cab 2/3, CID 169th Meeting, 20 February 1923.
3. Cab 4/10, CID Paper 468-B, 12 December 1923.
4. See in particular WO Memo, Cab 5/4, CID Paper 159-C, 4 February 1922.

the Coalition Government appointed the Mond Committee to investigate the charge.[1] Reporting in January 1923, this Cabinet Sub-Committee concluded that no substantial economies could be made by the amalgamation of these common services unless the three departments themselves could be incorporated within a Ministry of Defence.[2] Understandably, the Government shrank from taking such a revolutionary step. Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, opined that it would not be possible to create such a body "for a considerable time".[3] In fact, the amalgamation of certain common services did not materialise until after the Second World War, and then only to a limited extent.[4]

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By the end of 1925 the future of the RAF was assured. The Army's opposition to a third Service, persistent and strenuous though it had been throughout the early 1920s, had failed to put an end to the new department or to restrict its growth. At home, as the nation's first line of defence against air attack, the Air Force had embarked upon a massive programme of expansion, whilst, overseas, it had established itself as a viable alternative to the Army in the control of the mandated territory of Iraq.

Events were to prove that, in the matter of home defence, the increase in airpower was not to be fully realised in the immediate future. In Europe, the sense of security engendered by the Locarno Treaty, to be followed shortly be severe economic depression and prolonged attempts at international disarmament, served to stunt any growth in the nation's armed forces. Further afield, however, the problem of policing and defending the Empire, made the more pressing by the military threat anticipated from the Soviet Union and Japan, was to afford ample opportunity for further conflict between the two fighting services.

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1. Lord Weir became Chairman of the Committee in October 1922 in succession to Lord Mond.
2. Cab 24/158, CP 22(23), January 1923.
3. *Hansard*, (HC5s), Vol.152, Col.393, 21 March 1922.
4. F.A.Johnson, *Defence by Committee*, p.174.

PART II

THE ROLE OF AIRCRAFT IN IMPERIAL POLICING AND DEFENCE

Chapter 5

The Middle East:
Iraq, Aden, the Sudan and Palestine
May 1922 - September 1936

On the 1st October 1922, AVM Sir John Salmond took over command of British and Indian troops in Iraq. The force comprised nine battalions, two batteries, four armoured car companies, some defence vessels, and eight squadrons RAF. In addition, there were three regiments of Kurds, three battalions of Assyrians, one battalion of Arabs, and a pack battery, over all of which he had executive control for operations.[1] Such a force was to prove by no means excessive. Throughout 1922 Turkey had been active in the area, organising political intrigue, disseminating propaganda, and providing armed support for dissident tribes. By October matters were swiftly coming to a head. On his arrival, Salmond found that powerful Turkish forces were grouped along the northern frontier and that some irregular troops had crossed into Mosul.[2]

Added to these field difficulties was to be the continued opposition of the WO to the air control scheme. The embittered relations between Britain and Turkey, not fully remedied until the Turko-Iraq Treaty of June 1926, led to constant border incursions and provided thereby ample opportunity for criticism and dissent. Just five days after the Air Ministry had officially taken over control, the Cabinet had under consideration a memo by the Secretary of State for War warning about the situation in Mosul. The line of communication between Baghdad and Mosul, the paper pointed out, was liable to be cut if hostile forces made a flank advance of 50 miles. Mosul would then be beleaguered. Too much reliance could not be placed on the Arab army. If the Turks attacked in force at Mosul, neither the British nor the Arabs could put up an effective resistance.

The Cabinet, whilst reminding the WO that the Air Ministry was now in control of Iraq, agreed that the AOC Mesopotamia should be informed that if his more northerly detachments and lines of communication with Mosul were likely to be threatened, he was at liberty, in consultation with the High Commissioner, to withdraw

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1. Salmond Papers, AC 73/14, Notes on Iraq and India.
2. For a highly subjective account of this first crisis see Laffin, op.cit., p.162ff. For a general account of Iraq during the interwar years see Hannaford, op.cit.

the forces to whatever line he thought advisable to avoid the garrison being beleaguered.[1]

Later that month, however, the Air Ministry received a striking testimony to the early success of their air control scheme. A report from the High Commissioner stated that the Turkish elements had withdrawn from almost every area into which they had penetrated. This had been achieved by "vigorous and sustained air audacity". Furthermore, the report claimed that the Turks had been driven out by air action alone.[2] Trenchard lost no time in sending a copy of the report to Cavan. This report, he claimed, justified to some extent the air claims made in the past. In this instance, prompt action had been taken with a full knowledge of what the Air could do.[3] The CIGS was not so easily convinced. He replied:

> The General Staff feel that the recent successes attained by air action in Kurdistan against small Turkish detachments hardly enable them as yet to endorse the AOC's confidence in his ability to meet any scale of attack that the Turks could probably develop in Iraq ...[4]

In effect, what the WO was anxious to achieve was a complete withdrawal to Basra. In a private letter to the Duke of Devonshire at this time, the Secretary of State for War, Lord Derby, confided that he was in favour of "cutting our losses". Basra and the pipeline there could be held with comparatively few troops and at very little cost, whereas to attempt to hold the whole country would be beyond the Government's strength and power. A scheme of air control was certainly no solution. He continued:

> The Air Force think that they can protect the whole country. It is a new force and they have all the optimism of youth. I am

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1. CP 4192, Cab 23/31, Cabinet Meeting 56(22), 5 October 1922.
2. Air 19/109, The Development of Air Control in Iraq, 21 October 1922.
3. Trenchard Papers, II/27/39, Trenchard to Cavan, 23 October 1922.
4. Ibid., Cavan to Trenchard, 15 November 1922.

> perfectly certain that the air force alone, unsupported by bayonets, is quite incapable of defence of this vast area.[1]

As to the question of Mosul, he did not see the need to remain there on account of oil deposits. He could not envisage any sane-minded business man building an oil factory at Mosul for many years to come. The area would be a constant source of danger even if some agreement were reached with the Turks at Lausanne.[2] He agreed that certain pledges had been made to King Feisal, but considered that these might be rescinded by paying the King a sum of money. Even a large amount would be a small outlay in comparison with the cost involved in holding the country for the next ten years. Opponents would condemn such action as a policy of scuttle, but he felt that, in the circumstances, it was the wisest move.[3]

The Air Staff harboured no such misgivings. Reasons for the success of their scheme, they announced in the New Year, were the speed with which all parts of the country could be visited and controlled, the elimination of practically all kinds of "ground bait", and the avoidance of isolated detachments.[4] Likewise in March, the Colonial Office, reporting on the progress of the air scheme, argued that the success of the operations the previous month, in which Salmond had advanced his forces to Mosul and forced the Turks to withdraw, would not have been possible had not the commander possessed an intimate knowledge of the air arm and a firm belief in the value of ample airpower. Furthermore, claimed the Colonial Office, by means of air transport it had been possible to achieve a highly centralised yet wide understanding of that

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1. Derby Papers, WO 137/12, Derby to Duke of Devonshire, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 8 December 1922.
2. The Treaty of Lausanne, finally approved on 24 July 1923, settled all matters between Britain and Turkey save the question of Mosul. This issue was left for discussion between the two countries with the provision that if no agreement were reached within nine months the matter would be referred to the League of Nations.
3. Derby Papers, WO 137/12, Derby to Devonshire, 8 December 1922.
4. Air 8/34, Folio 22, Air Staff Note, 23 January 1923.

type of intelligence which was the essence of wise and economical control.[1] Trenchard, however, preferred to play it cool. A report drawn up by the Air Staff at the request of the Air Minister to show the success of RAF control was not circulated. "I would strongly urge," Trenchard added to the draft copy, "that no circulation of this paper is made at present as I think it would be likely to promote controversy when we are comparing what we have done with the Army."[2]

Such caution proved of no avail. In January 1924, following a debate in the COS Sub-Committee on the respective responsibilities of the fighting services,[3] the General Staff raised the question of command in Iraq and Palestine. In the event of reinforcements having to be sent into either of these territories, stated their memo, the Army Council were "naturally" not prepared to entrust any considerable body of troops to the command of an Air Officer for active operations in what would almost certainly be a land campaign. Should an attack by land be launched upon the Mandates, then a land campaign would be required to defeat it and the air forces would then revert to their normal war role of supplementary cooperation with the Army. The conduct of the operations would then have to be entrusted to a soldier. The Army Council considered that when total military forces employed amounted to a division, despatched to carry out a ground campaign, control of the territory must pass to the WO. It was admitted that the precise moment when this transfer of command took place was difficult to define in advance but, in the opinion of the Council, such a transfer must be deliberate, decided by the Cabinet and, above all, made in good time. If conditions necessitated the substitution of a military commander, then the sooner the decision was taken the better.[4]

This whole question of command was to be put severely to the test the following year, but at the beginning of 1924 a fresh

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1. Salmond Papers, AC/73/14, Notes on Iraq and India, Report by the Colonial Office, April 1922 - March 1923.
2. Air 5/476, Note by Trenchard dated 4 July 1923.
3. Cab 53/1, COS 6th Meeting, 8 January 1924.
4. Cab 53/12, COS Paper 7, 25 January 1924. See also Air 9/14, Folio 86.

dispute arose over the defence of certain oilfields in southern Persia.[1] At a meeting of the CID in February, Trenchard pointed out that a qualified promise made by the Air Staff in May 1922 to send a force from Iraq to defend oilfields in southern Persia could no longer be met. At the time the undertaking was given there had been twelve battalions in Iraq; that number had now been reduced to four. He felt that the problem of the protection of these oilfields was, in fact, a question for the General Staff. The Army, however, would not be used in this way. Major General Sir John Burnett-Stuart, the DMOI, claimed that the WO no longer had any responsibility whatever in regard to Iraq. Whilst recognising that the protection of the oilfields was an imperial obligation, they considered that it was necessary for the nearest commander available to make the necessary preparations concerning possible operations in that district.[2]

This argument was expanded in a note by the General Staff[3] the following month. In it they claimed that when the Air Ministry had been entrusted with the sole military control of Palestine and Iraq, the WO had taken it for granted that the contingent responsibilities which were the inevitable corollary of independent military command had also been assumed by the Air Force. Had the WO remained in control of Iraq, the GOC might well have stated that his forces were not adequate to safeguard the oilfields, but this would not have absolved the WO from its responsibility. The note continued:

> In like circumstances the fighting services presumably assume like obligations; no other solution is

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1. In May 1922 it had been agreed by a Standing Defence Sub-Committee of the CID that under a scheme prepared by the Air Staff a qualified promise of military assistance from Iraq could be given for the protection of oilfields in southern Persia. At that time the force considered adequate for this protection was 4½ battalions, 2 sections of armoured cars, and supporting aircraft. See Cab 5/4, CID Paper 168-C, 8 May 1922.
2. Cab 2/4, CID 182nd Meeting, 25 February 1924.
3. Cab 5/5, CID Paper 224-C, 20 March 1924.

> practicable, and the General Staff are at a loss to understand how the Air Ministry should claim exemption from this well established rule.[1]

The General Staff, continued the note, could only assume this responsibility if they were given such standing and representation in Iraq as would allow them to study the problem, and also given some control of the available resources which would enable them to deal with it. There was an important principle at stake. If the Air Ministry, while entrusted with the sole military command and control in Iraq and Palestine, could unload onto the WO the responsibility for contending with regional problems, then the converse should hold for areas for which the WO were responsible. Such a system of dual responsibility was difficult to visualise in practice.[2]

When the memo was circulated to the CID in April, Cavan maintained that the Air Ministry had to accept full responsibility for the areas under their control. Lord Thomson, Secretary of State for Air, retorted that his Ministry did accept full responsibility. With regard to the Persian oilfields, however, they were not prepared to give a definite guarantee, but would take such action as was possible with the forces at their disposal.[3]

The General Staff's opposition in this instance was stilled by the report of the Sub-Committee. It pointed out that since the Treaty of Lausanne, approved in July 1923, the strength of the regular infantry in Iraq had been reduced to four battalions and further reductions were planned. In view of this, the Committee recommended that the Government of India be asked to accept the liability of providing the small ground force required, this force to be under the command of the AOC Iraq. WO liability was to be kept to a minimum; the Committee merely asked that they accept the responsibility for replacing the force sent from India as soon as the forces at their disposal made this possible.[4]

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1. Cab 5/5, CID Paper 224-C, 20 March 1924.
2. Ibid.
3. Cab 2/4, CID 183rd Meeting, 3 April 1924.
4. Cab 5/5, CID Paper 227-C, 7 July 1924.

General Lord Rawlinson, C-in-C India, subsequently agreed that India would be prepared to send two brigades of infantry and two armoured car sections to assist in the protection of the Persian oilfields, provided that imperial troops were still in occupation of Basra.[1]

With regard to the general situation in Iraq, Trenchard was feeling optimistic by May 1924. He considered that, if necessary, the air forces there were strong enough to carry out action against several tribes simultaneously. The levies had also improved considerably in efficiency and the Arab army was 5,500 strong and of proven value.[2] Thus at a meeting of the COS in mid-May, a new Turkish threat was viewed with equanimity. A report before the Committee considered that the Turks could not organise an attack on Mosul in greater strength than 7,000 men and that this force would be ill-equipped by modern European standards. To oppose such an attack, the AOC Iraq could make use of some 5,000 men within ten days and 7,000 within one month, excluding three to four squadrons of aircraft and two or three armoured car companies. It was agreed, however, that in the event of the Turks determining to seize Mosul by force, it would be impossible to maintain the British position and that discretion would have to be given to the AOC concerning the possibility of withdrawal.[3]

When this report came before the CID, the CIGS "confirmed its conclusions as to the best line of opposition against Turkey if such a contingency should ever arise".[4] In July, however, following renewed fighting along the border, the General Staff changed their tune. They proposed that the whole of the first contingent of the Expeditionary Force should be sent to Iraq, arguing that if war broke out with Turkey, Iraq should be made the area in which the conflict should be decided. This was something which the Air Staff had never supported and it was in complete contradiction to all previous WO policy. The only reason suggested for this change of view, contained - according to an Air Staff note - in a personal

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1. Cab 5/5, CID Paper 233-C, Appendix A, 8 November 1924.
2. Cab 2/4, CID 184th Meeting, 5 May 1924.
3. Cab 53/1, COS 9th Meeting, 14 May 1924.
4. Cab 2/4, CID 185th Meeting, 19 June 1924.

letter from Burnett-Stuart, was that if war did break out with Turkey, Britain would be fighting as a mandatary of the League of Nations. The Air Staff found it difficult to understand how that fact could make strategically safe what had been previously denounced as strategically dangerous, or how it could solve the problem of sending a large body of white troops into the heart of Asia in possibly the most trying season of the year.[1] For their part, the WO doubtless saw in such a move the possibility of regaining command in Iraq.

In the event, the threat came to nothing. Even during the worst of the crisis in September and October, when the garrison in Iraq was down to four battalions with only 11,000 local forces instead of the 15,000 recommended, no reinforcements were called for. Notes written by the Air Staff in November and sent to their Minister made much of the feat. "Our air control," one paragraph read, "was never intended to meet a crisis of external aggression and yet we have successfully withstood a deliberate invasion by regular and irregular Turkish troops, though admittedly in small numbers, without a rising in the country."[2] An Air Ministry publication of the same month claimed that the past eighteen months had witnessed a very remarkable improvement in the respect paid everywhere to Government, and in the general condition of peace and order throughout the country. This improvement, it contended, was clearly related to the exercise of air control.[3]

Looking to the future, a report by the COS considered that the existing forces in Iraq were sufficient to delay any advance by the Turkish forces then to the north of Mosul until reinforcements arrived, provided that the Turks had not infiltrated or moved bodies of troops across the northern border.

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1. Air 8/34, Item 27, Air Staff Note, Summary of the attitude shown by the WO regarding the Mandate of Iraq, 22 July 1924.
2. Air 19/107, CAS to Secretary of State for Air, Notes, Chapter 5, Iraq, December 1923 to November 1924.
3. Air Ministry Publication 1105, Iraq Command, October 1922 to April 1924, published November 1924. Available at Adastral Library, Adastral House, London.

On the question of command, it was felt that, if needed, the first reinforcements should be under the supreme command of the AOC, but that when subsequent reinforcements arrived, the question would then arise as to whether a commander-in-chief should be appointed.[1]

This whole subject of command came to a head a year later when the Turks again massed along the Mosul border. In October, the CIGS advised the CAS that the question of command should further reinforcments be required after the despatch of Echelon A had been raised by India and that he was going to bring the matter up in the near future.[2] At a meeting of the CID a week later, Trenchard urged that the AOC Iraq be granted complete liberty to take action at once in the event of a violation by the Turks. Cavan agreed, but raised the question of command. The Indian Government and the General Staff, he pointed out, were quite prepared to place the troops composing Echelon A under the command of the AOC. On the other hand, if Echelon B - which involved a Divisional Commander and Divisional Staff - were required, then they were definitely of the opinion that the C-in-C should be appointed to take command. The Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead, endorsed this point of view. He felt that unless this was agreed, it would be doubtful whether the Indian Government would allow Echelon B to proceed to Iraq.[3]

At the beginning of December, with the situation deteriorating, the CIGS viewed with alarm the prospect of war with Turkey. Should the Turkish claims, then under consideration by the League of Nations, be rejected, he feared that the Turks might take the law into their own hands. If this happened, air action might delay but could not prevent the Turkish capture of Mosul. To recapture this area would require the mobilisation and despatch of the whole of the British Expeditionary Force. His note continued:

> Such a war would involve the whole of

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1. Cab 4/11, CID Paper 512-B, 4 November 1924.
2. Air 8/34, Folio 27, Part II/1, CIGS to CAS, 8 October 1925.
3. Cab 2/4, CID 203rd Meeting, 15 October 1925.

> the reduced military resources of the Empire and even if successful would be entirely profitless, disastrously expensive and of unlimited duration.[1]

In reply, the Air Staff complained that the General Staff had no solution to offer but to state at the eleventh hour that the policy with which they had agreed six weeks earlier would probably end in disaster, and that the various alternative means of bringing pressure to bear on the Turks would be futile.[2]

A few days later, having cast doubts upon the strategy to be adopted in the event of a Turkish attack, Cavan wrote to Trenchard concerning the question of command if combined military and air operations proved necessary. He proposed that the GOC designate of the Indian Division comprising Echelon B should go at once to Iraq to confer with the AOC and to make such recommendations as he might think necessary. The letter continued:

> I am sure you must see that it is only reasonable that a man who may have to take command in a serious military operation on land should have an opportunity of a preliminary discussion and reconnaissance with the AOC on the spot.[3]

Two days later the proposal was put formally in a memo to the COS.[4]

Trenchard gave vent to his feelings in a minute to his Minister. He resented very strongly, he told him, the way in which the WO and General Staff were continually criticising all the work the Air Ministry were doing in carrying out their important and extremely difficult task in Iraq. The note continued:

> The Air Ministry have shouldered the responsibility of accepting some risk and for over three years they have saved millions with this risk ever hanging over them. From the day the present scheme was proposed, the WO and General Staff have opposed with

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1. Cab 24/176, Note by CIGS, contained in CP 513(25), 2 December 1925.
2. Air 8/34, Folio 27, Part II/6, Air Staff Note, 2 December 1925.
3. Ibid., Part II/7, CIGS to CAS, 5 December 1925.
4. Cab 53/12, COS Paper 31, 7 December 1925.

> great bitterness our taking control,
> and ever since they have been making
> the greatest efforts to resume control.[1]

What the Army really wanted, claimed Trenchard, was to take over control from the Air Ministry, in spite of the fact that the air scheme had proved to be a great success. Thus they felt it their duty to alarm the Cabinet and the CID about the situation in Iraq. On the question of command, Trenchard put it to his Minister, Sir Samuel Hoare, that there would be sufficient time for this matter to be resolved when the second Echelon was asked for. It would take six weeks to arrive and this would enable the new commander to be in Iraq a month before his troops arrived in order to "clear up the alleged muddle".[2]

At a meeting of the COS the following day, both Service Chiefs expanded their arguments, discussion being centred mainly around the question of command once it had been decided that the second Echelon of Indian reinforcements was required. Lord Cavan wanted it resolved there and then that on the demand for the second Echelon the command in Iraq would automatically be transferred to the GOC Indian Division and the ministerial control of the operations to the WO. He argued that by the time this Echelon had arrived in Iraq, the conditions required for military command would *ipso facto* have been fulfilled. In the interests of efficiency, it was essential to decide the issue at once.

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1. Air 8/34, Folio 27, Part II/10, Minute by CAS to Secretary of State for Air, 10 December 1925.
2. Ibid. Three days earlier, on the day the General Staff Memo had been written, Trenchard had penned an even stronger note, but this does not appear to have been sent to Hoare. One paragraph reads:

   > I must say that this continual attacking by the General Staff and the questioning of the responsibility of the Air Ministry to carry out operations has already done untold harm, brought about increased friction between the staffs and, instead of one big Department receiving the full and sympathetic help of another Department, they have received nothing but a series of unhelpful suggestions, criticisms and alarmist papers.

   Ibid., Note by CAS, 7 December 1925.

Trenchard, on the other hand, held that, even when the second Echelon had arrived, it might well be used in a supporting role. The Committee was not justified, therefore, in taking a decision which would tend to reduce the powers of the AOC and to impair the confidence of the Iraqi Government and people in the present defence arrangements. The necessity for the despatch of the second Echelon might never arise, but if it did, then there would be ample time to decide the question of command and the decision could then be taken with the full knowledge of the type of operation which was developing.[1]

The debate was continued at a meeting of the CID held on the same day. Hoare said that the AOC was in a difficult position and his job was not being made easier by the present controversy. Any decision to transfer responsibility from the Air Ministry to the WO was bound to leak out and would be seen to suggest that the Government had no confidence in the Air Force. Furthermore, the arrival of a Lt.General in Iraq would be followed by the despatch of masses of troops and the danger of being irresistibly drawn into a conflict with the Turkish Empire. The War Minister, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, regarded such a suggestion as "fantastic". In his view, forces equivalent to one division should pass under the control of a GOC. Churchill, however, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, felt that numbers had nothing to do with the matter. The arrival of more troops did not necessarily change the operations from air to land. The tactics contemplated were the retirement of ground troops combined with vigorous offensive from the air. In his opinion a force of eight air squadrons was incomparably greater as a striking force than a force of one division employed largely on lines of communication.

The arguments advanced by the Air Ministry won the day. It was decided that the first reinforcements should be under the control of the AOC and that the decision as to whether a C-in-C should be appointed would be resolved before subsequent reinforcements were despatched.[2] The Colonial Secretary, L.S.

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1. Cab 53/1, COS 26th Meeting, 11 December 1925.
2. Cab 2/4, CID 207th Meeting, 11 December 1925.

Amery, was in Geneva at the time of the meeting, but made his attitude plain in a telegram to Sir Samuel Wilson a few days later. He was, he said, absolutely opposed to WO control in Iraq under any circumstances.[1] Trenchard wrote to AVM Sir Edward Ellington at the end of December:

> I have had a tremendous time at home, with the General Staff attacking me all the time with regard to our command in Iraq and everything connected with it. You will be glad to hear that .. I kept my end up and we have not handed over the command of Iraq to the WO, which they wanted and still want; and Higgins has not been superseded by an Army General as the WO also wanted; we have not mobilised divisions to fight Turkey; and we have not run the Empire into a state of disaster.[2]

In the New Year the international situation improved and, as a consequence, much of the heat was taken out of the dispute between the two services. In June, a friendly agreement was signed at Angora by the British, Turkish and Iraqi Governments, and war with Turkey ceased to be a serious possibility.

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No sooner had relations in Iraq become more restrained, however, than the two services came into conflict over the control of the garrison at Aden. As early as May 1922, Trenchard had seen the possibility of reducing this garrison by one battalion, as envisaged at the Cairo Conference. He had written to Ellington, then AOC Middle East, "It seems to me that the garrison could come down to two battalions .. as a first step. I have always believed and hoped that in due course Aden will become an air controlled station just like Iraq."[3]

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1. Air 8/34, Folio 27, Part II/16, Amery to Sir Samuel Wilson, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 14 December 1925.
2. Trenchard Papers, II/27/63/2, Trenchard to Ellington, 29 December 1925. Ellington was then AOC India, and AVM Sir John Higgins was AOC Iraq.
3. Trenchard Papers, II/27/63/1, Trenchard to Ellington, 29 May 1922.

It was not until late 1926, however, when troubles broke out with the forces of the neighbouring Imam of Yemen, that the Air Ministry was given its first real opportunity to push for an increase in RAF strength within the colony. At a meeting of the COS Sub-Committee in November, Trenchard claimed that a squadron of bombers would be able to prevent further encroachments by the Imam, provided that there were a certain number of local levies commanded by British officers to protect advanced landing grounds. The Colonial Office favoured the plan. The Army, faced with the alternative of bringing in Indian forces at a cost of £3 million, raised no objection, though Major General K. Stewart, GOC Aden, warned that the raising of levies would take a long time. However, if the Air Force were authorised to operate across the frontier, he considered that the plan might be successful.[1]

The following month, however, the Cabinet, bent on reducing the cost of the garrison, asked the COS whether this might be achieved by withdrawing one of the British infantry battalions once the increase had been made in the bomber force.[2] This suggestion brought an immediate objection from the CIGS. The Imam, he pointed out to the COS Committee, had an army of 2,500 men and three or four batteries of artillery available for operations on the Aden border, together with an indefinite number of tribesmen. The General Staff had agreed to the employment of more bombers on this front, but should offensive action be decided upon, the possibility of an attack on Aden itself had to be borne in mind. Furthermore, a reduction of one battalion would not permit the protection of sufficient hinterland to ensure the safety of Aden harbour. There was, too, the pressing problem of internal security and the possibility of having to send reinforcements to Perim and Somaliland. It was recognised policy to have a British garrison at an important naval base, but it was particularly desirable at Aden, where the population was extremely mixed.[3]

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1. Cab 53/1, COS 37th Meeting, 3 November 1926.
2. Cab 53/13, COS Paper 58, Extract from Conclusions of Cabinet Meeting 66(26), 16 December 1926.
3. Ibid., COS Paper 65, Memo by CIGS, 7 January 1927.

At the next meeting of the COS, the CIGS, General Sir George Milne, took the war into the enemy's camp, and tempers were lost.[1] The disbandment of the British battalion, he told Trenchard, was a matter for the Army Council and he was not prepared to discuss it. Such a question could not be considered from the narrow standpoint of Aden, but had to be examined in the light of the Army's strategic distribution. He had never dreamt that the increase in bombers would be used as a "lever" to reduce the infantry garrison. The CAS retorted that, in his view, the possibility of a land attack upon the Colony was slight at that time, and that the disbandment of the battalion could not be delayed.[2]

In a memo a few days later, Trenchard set out the Air Staff's case. The present garrison, he claimed, had been unable to withstand encroachment. It would be more efficient and economical to retain the RAF squadron combined with irregular levies and to re-employ the British battalion elsewhere. A squadron of aircraft was "ample insurance" against further attacks, and aerial reconnaissance would provide plenty of warning against the approach of an enemy by sea. As far as internal security was concerned, the CAS minimised the dangers amidst "a populace hitherto tranquil and of widely varying sympathies". Furthermore, an increased number of aircraft would enable rapid reinforcement to be sent to outlying areas, such as Somaliland, and, in addition, would permit British influence to be extended by air demonstration and visits. Lastly, on the question of comparative cost, he estimated that an annual saving of £100,000 would be achieved, this being mainly due to the fact that the location of a squadron at Aden did not involve an increase in the total strength of the

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1. Trenchard wrote to Hoare two days after the meeting, "I had a terrific wrangle yesterday (*sic*) with Beatty and Milne on the subject of Aden and South Africa." See Trenchard Papers, II/27/85, Trenchard to Hoare, 27 January 1927. The controversy over South African defence is referred to later in this work.
   Trenchard was promoted MRAF 1 January 1927.
2. Cab 53/1, COS 43rd Meeting, 25 January 1927.

RAF and thus entailed no initial cost.[1]

Later that month the CIGS renewed his opposition, this time in a memo to Hankey. It was false economy, he argued, to substitute inferior and unreliable natives for British troops in a place of such importance. Nor could aircraft defend the frontier. The hill tribes did not advance in massed formations, nor did they attack in daylight. The results of air operations on the North West Frontier of India did not encourage much faith in the ability of aircraft in such terrain. He agreed that reinforcement by air could be quickly carried out from Egypt and that it would be much cheaper than sending troops by sea. It seemed wiser and more logical, therefore, to leave infantry on the spot - the surest form of close defence - and to reinforce it when necessary by the arm which could reach there most quickly and economically. Greater mobility and range had their advantages, but they were not essential to a sure defence. Turning to the matter of cost, he claimed that the permanent location of a squadron at Aden meant a loss of a squadron from home defence and that the replacement of this unit would certainly involve capital expenditure. Nor had account been taken of the cost of extra aerodromes.[2]

Another stormy meeting of the COS followed in March at which Beatty supported the CIGS. Milne held that air action could not prevent tribesmen from crossing the frontier. The best results would be achieved by cooperation between the two services. If the garrison were reduced by a battalion there would be insufficient troops to ensure that cooperation and the port would not be secure. Later, when Trenchard cited the cases of Colombo, Trincomalee and Sierra Leone as examples of important naval bases which were without British garrisons, Milne argued that this in no way affected the case; indeed, it pointed to the need to consider whether British garrisons should not be stationed at these points. Trenchard stuck to his guns. He saw a time in the not too distant future, he said, when the garrison would be

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1. Cab 53/13, COS Paper 66, 3 February 1927.
2. Ibid., COS Paper 67, Minute from CAS to Secretary, 25 February 1927.

reduced to one squadron RAF, half a troop of cavalry, and some 500 levies. He supported the view recently expressed by Mr. Churchill and Mr. Amery that the Middle East territories should be considered as one military sphere for aircraft in imperial defence.[1]

The argument was continued at CID level, and here Trenchard found a staunch ally in the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The General Staff, declared Churchill, exaggerated the danger from sea attack. He had already made a cut of £100,000 in the Middle East vote in anticipation of substantial economies. Air control had proved itself in Somaliland and Iraq, and large savings could be effected by handing Aden over to the Air Force. The advice of the General Staff should be discarded. Amery also felt that a large British garrison was out of place. For the Army, Lt.General Sir Thomas Scott, formerly GOC Aden Brigade, deprecated the employment of local levies. These, he pointed out, would have to come from the Yemen, a country eaten up with jealousy and fanaticism.

Having studied the arguments put forward by the Chiefs of Staff, the Committee agreed that the question of the Aden garrison should be considered by the Cabinet and that an expert committee should be appointed to examine the relative costs of the various proposals.[2] After some delay, the Cabinet gave their ruling in October, pronouncing in favour of the RAF taking over command of Aden and its surrounding territories. Under the air control scheme the existing garrison was to be replaced by one RAF squadron, three armoured car companies, and tribal forces numbering 4,000 to 5,000.[3]

The following February the defence of Aden and its hinterland was placed under the command of Group Captain W.G.S. Mitchell. His leadership and the air control scheme as a whole were put to the test almost at once. Following the capture by the

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1. Cab 53/2, COS 44th Meeting, 14 March 1927. Churchill and Amery were speaking at the 221st Meeting of the CID held on 25 February 1927. See Cab 2/5.
2. Cab 2/5, CID 226th Meeting, 5 May 1927.
3. Cab 23/55, Cabinet Meeting 52(27), 26 October 1927.

Imam of two sheiks under British protection, air operations were directed against his frontier garrisons. In a little over a month the Imam was returning his captives and suing for peace. A delighted Trenchard wrote to Mitchell in mid-April:

> .. you may be glad to know that everybody thinks it perfectly marvellous what the air force did ... and it has had the greatest possible effect on important political persons at home. Though it will not appear in the papers, I am continually telling all that twelve officers under a good squadron leader have ended a five year squabble in five weeks.[1]

Such outstanding success gave the General Staff little opportunity to attempt to change a situation which they had tried so hard to avert. Indeed, such an occasion did not present itself until the latter part of 1935 when, on account of the Abyssinian crisis, reinforcements were despatched to Aden in the form of ground troops. In a letter dated 15th November, Wing Commander G.C. Pirie, a member of the DOI, warned the DCAS, AVM C.L. Courtney, that the General Staff were anxious to reopen the question of command at Aden. He reported that the Army officer in charge of troops there, Lt.Colonel N.M. McLeod, was complaining to the WO that, as Aden was a fortress and thus governed by the provisions of the Coast Defence Manual, his position was not inferior to but co-equal with the AOC.[2] Commenting upon this matter in a memo to the DCAS the same day, Group Captain R.H. Peck, the DDOI, pointed out that McLeod had been nursing such grievances for some months. The note added:

> I dare say the climate has got to his head a bit. I think it is not good for cooperation between the two services that soldiers should resent ever having to work under the RAF and we ought not to give in meekly to any approaches of this kind.[3]

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1. Trenchard Papers, II/27/131, Trenchard to Mitchell, 16 April 1928.
2. Air 2/1294, Item 30A, Pirie to Courtney, 15 November 1935.
3. Ibid., Item 30A/2, Peck to Courtney, 15 November 1935.

Later that month the DD Plans informed the DCAS that, in his view, the real aim behind the agitation was to have McLeod made Fortress Commander so that he could refer his disagreement, as well as anything else he pleased, direct to the WO.[1]

Early in December the matter was officially raised in a letter from the CIGS to the CAS, ACM Sir Edward Ellington. The General Staff, stated FM Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd, was anxious that a more senior officer should assume the appointment of OC troops at Aden as a temporary measure during the emergency. He also suggested that all land forces - including Aden's levies and armoured cars - should be placed under this officer's command.[2] This letter provoked a strong attack on the WO from the DDOI, Group Captain A. Harris. "This has been written by Hutton," he told Pirie. "It was to be expected, and is a continuation of his efforts which throughout the present circumstances have been directed towards increasing the Army hold and decreasing the Air Force hold on Commands in the various territories in the Middle East." Harris contended that now that Aden was becoming rapidly important as a fortress, the Army was aiming to take over control and leave the AOC simply responsible for operations in the Protectorate. However, as there were only two 9.2 and 6 inch guns at Aden, it could be argued that the main armament of the fortress was the Air Force. In fact, Aden was an example of a fortress where the aeroplane and not the gun was the primary defence weapon. The Army's proposals, he warned again, were the "thin end of the wedge", aimed at depriving the Air Ministry of all effective control in Aden.[3]

In a minute to the CAS, Mr. C.G. Evans, an Assistant Secretary at the Air Ministry, echoed the same fears. If the Air Force were to accept the WO theory that all "troops" should be put under the senior military officer, he cautioned, then it would not be very long before the Army were claiming that it

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1. Air 2/1294, Item 30A/7, DD Plans to DCAS, 26 November 1935.
2. Ibid., Item 46A, CIGS to CAS, December 1935.
3. Ibid., Item 34, Harris to Pirie, 10 December 1935. Colonel T.J. Hutton was then General Staff Officer at the WO.

would be much more suitable for the whole command to be a military one with the air unit operating under an Air Force officer who was subordinate to the military commander.[1] In his reply, Ellington informed the CIGS that whilst he raised no objection to a more senior Army officer being appointed at Aden, he was opposed to the suggestion that this officer should have command of all land forces. The levies and armoured cars, he pointed out, were normally used for the defence of RAF bases and landing grounds, and they also formed a central reserve. As such they should remain under the direct control of the AOC.[2]

The Army made one more attempt. The CIGS replied the following day suggesting two alternatives: the AOC to be in supreme command but with all land forces grouped under the senior military officer, or, otherwise, all the Services to command their own forces, as practised in Singapore, with the AOC, as the fortress commander, being responsible for coordination, and assuming supreme command in the case of extreme danger.[3] After consulting with Air Commodore C.F.A. Portal, who had just returned from the command of Aden, the CAS made it clear to the CIGS that he remained opposed to the idea of interposing new headquarters with "all its paraphernalia" between the land forces and the AOC. Even with additional reinforcements, Aden remained a small command wherein the major problem was the defence of the Protectorate. It could not be compared with Singapore, where the main concern was defence against all forms of attack.[4]

Five days later Montgomery-Massingberd reluctantly agreed that his Army officer in Aden would only be responsible for Army units and would remain under the command of the AOC, but he made it clear that he was far from satisfied with that arrangement.[5]

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1. Air 2/1294, Item 37, Evans to Ellington, 18 December 1935.
2. Ibid., Item 46A, CAS to CIGS, 19 December 1935.
3. Ibid., CIGS to CAS, 20 December 1935.
4. Ibid., CAS to CIGS, 16 January 1936.
5. Ibid., CIGS to CAS, 21 January 1936.

Such attempts by the General Staff to seize back some if not all of the authority once vested in them in Aden were symptomatic of the continued determination of the Army to regain the power and prestige which had been slowly eroded by airpower over the years. No opportunity, however meagre, was lost in an attempt to recover lost ground or challenge new claims by the Air Staff. Indeed, this determined opposition was also to be seen at work in the Sudan, where the threat of fanatical tribalism offered yet another opportunity for the Air Ministry to spread their wings.

It was in July 1926, during a review of imperial defence by the CID, that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Austen Chamberlain, suggested that a small committee consisting of representatives from the Foreign Office, Air Ministry and WO should be set up to consider the best means of dealing with any future outbreaks of Mahdism in the territory. At this meeting the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Churchill, favoured the employment of a squadron of aircraft and felt sure that airpower would prove as successful as it had done in Iraq.[1]

The deliberations of this select committee revealed once again the deep gulf dividing the WO and Air Ministry on the question of imperial policing. The Air Staff argued that the existing flight of aircraft at Khartoum was insufficient. If this force were increased to a squadron, however, the garrison could be reduced by one British infantry battalion without danger to the security of the country. The lines of communication from Port Sudan were remote from the danger areas to the south and west of Khartoum and it therefore seemed unnecessary to retain a British infantry battalion permanently in the Sudan with the main purpose of protecting these lines in the unlikely event of an outbreak of Mahdism. The General Staff again proved reluctant to reduce ground forces in such an area. They were not prepared to recommend a reduction beyond the present number of battalions. Comparison with Iraq was not fully justified. The Sudan was more than six times larger than Iraq and there were less than half the number

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1. Cab 2/4, CID 215th Meeting, 22 July 1926.

of troops to guard it.[1]

The Committee's recommendation that air strength should be increased to one squadron but that, in the first instance, there should be no reduction in British Army units, was not generally favoured when the CID discussed the matter in February 1927. The recommendation was allowed to stand, but Sir Austen Chamberlain felt it extremely improbable that the Sudan would be able to bear the additional cost. Churchill again came out strongly in support of the Air Force. He confessed that he could not understand the opposition to control by air. It had clearly proved itself in Iraq, where 40,000 troops had been replaced by a few squadrons of aeroplanes. The General Staff's case was outlined by the War Minister, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans. He argued that one battalion was needed for the security of Khartoum itself, and another to defend lines of communication. In Iraq at that time, he pointed out, there was a garrison of some 16,500 men. In the Sudan, on the other hand, it was impossible to rely entirely upon local troops.[2]

This view was later supported by Sir John Maffey, Governor General of the Sudan. In a letter to Lord Lloyd in April, he claimed that an increase in air strength was not necessary and that the cost to the Sudan - based on the difference between the cost of a squadron's maintenance at home and at Khartoum - was not justified. Latent possibilities of trouble could not be countered or "in any way appreciably affected by the spectacle of aeroplanes flying overhead". In this, he noted, he was supported by Major General H.J. Huddleston, Commandant of the Sudan Defence Force, and by Lord Lloyd himself.[3] Such an attitude towards air control, retorted the Air Staff in a memo to the CID, was due in fact to the misuse of airpower. The flight in the Sudan had never been given an opportunity to prove its worth. Aircraft had been restricted to a much narrower range of duties than that undertaken in similar conditions by air units in other Middle East

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1. Cab 4/16, CID Paper 751-B, 10 November 1926.
2. Cab 2/4, CID 220th Meeting, 15 February 1927.
3. Cab 4/16, CID Paper 802-B, Enclosure 1, Maffey to Lloyd, 12 April 1927. Lord Lloyd was High Commissioner for Egypt and the Sudan, 1925-1929.

territories and along the North West Frontier. The memo continued:

> If aircraft were more fully employed and in larger numbers, the constant reminder which they would afford to the tribesmen of the ubiquity and power of the forces behind the Administration should be of as much value in the Sudan as in Iraq.[1]

In view of the Governor General's opinion and the extra cost involved in maintaining a flight detached from its parent squadron, the Air Staff recommended that the flight be withdrawn and returned to Egypt.[2]

When the matter was again discussed by the CID in July, both Lloyd and Maffey added further support to the WO case. The latter was particularly forthright. As the proposal to increase the Air Force was bound to bring up the question of removing one of the British battalions, he considered that it was best to leave the matter well alone. The Sudan was satisfied with the existing situation. Unlike some areas, such as the North West Frontier of India, distances were great, population was very sparse, and there was no possibility of surprise. Furthermore, aeroplanes would be out of touch with local information and would not have the same ease in establishing contact. In the North West Frontier, where tribes lived in compact and well known areas, aeroplanes could be used to great effect.[3]

Maffey's opinion of air control on the Indian frontier was certainly not shared by most Army personnel in India itself,[4] and shows the muddled thinking abroad at this time as to the efficacy of aircraft in imperial policing. The Air Minister, Sir Samuel Hoare, expressed surprise that he should consider mountainous country as suitable for air action and appeared to ignore the success of airpower in dealing with the scattered tribes in the flat areas of Iraq. He supported the Air Staff in

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1. Cab 4/16, CID Paper 809-B, Note by Air Staff, 22 June 1927.
2. Ibid.
3. Cab 2/5, CID 228th Meeting, 7 July 1927.
4. See this work, Chapter 6.

calling for the flight to be withdrawn. Trenchard again complained about the misuse of airpower in the Sudan. He claimed that the flight had not been given any work to do beyond taking up Army officers and others to give them air experience. Mr. Churchill confessed that he had listened to the views of Sir John Maffey with "surprise and pain". Airpower had proved itself in Iraq in spite of the solemn warnings of the General Staff. He favoured the full squadron and, in the last resort, would sooner see the required £30,000 paid out of the Imperial Exchequer than that a "wrong and reactionary turn should be given to our methods of defence". Support for this view came from both Amery and Sir Austen Chamberlain, and it was eventually recommended that the air force be increased to one squadron, leaving the size of the garrison to be re-examined in a year's time.[1] Maffey gladly accepted this proposal and later that month the Cabinet decided that "the efficacy of air forces in relation to the defence requirements of the Sudan should be given a fair and thorough trial".[2] Some negotiation did follow concerning the additional cost involved, but this was quickly and amicably settled between the Home and Sudanese Governments.[3] By the beginning of November, Trenchard could report that a full squadron was stationed at Khartoum.[4]

But opposition to any reduction in the military garrison was continued. The following March a report on operations during the previous three months was submitted to the CID by Lord Lloyd. Accounts therein by two Army officers who had taken part in expeditions against certain sections of the Nuer tribe came firmly to the conclusion that the number of ground troops could not be reduced by the employment of the air arm. Both officers agreed that the moral effect of aircraft was immense and served

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1. Cab 2/5, CID 228th Meeting, Item 3, 7 July 1927.
2. Cab 4/16, CID Paper 825-B, Enclosure, extract from conclusions of Cabinet Meeting 40(27), 13 July 1927.
3. Ibid., CID Paper 838-B, Lord Lloyd to Sir Austen Chamberlain, 17 October 1927.
4. Cab 2/5, CID 230th Meeting, 1 November 1927.

to shorten the length of the operations but, in the words of Captain J.R. Chidlaw-Roberts, "in operations of this nature covering a very extensive area, the RAF, although greatly assisting the troops, would not by their own action bring the operations to a successful conclusion". The officer commanding the air units, on the other hand, complained that once the ground force had been considerably increased, "the strong desire for a battle or some military objective at once came to the fore and definitely militated against full use being made of aircraft".[1]

Despite this report, however, by July Maffey was taking a less dogmatic attitude. Whilst regarding ground troops as of paramount importance in backward areas, he considered that, as soon as the Sudan could be regarded as secure, an adequate garrison would be one British battalion and one squadron RAF.[2] Meanwhile the Air Staff, anxious to gain independent command, emphasised the expertise required in air control schemes such as those in operation in Iraq and Aden. In October a memo to the CID stated:

> The salient lesson which that experience has taught is that the control of air operations in such circumstances is a highly specialised affair, and that the air arm is a weapon whose keen edge is all too easily blunted by misuse. [3]

Thus while the Army stuck doggedly to well-worn ways of isolated patrols and punitive expeditions, and the Air Force created an air of professional mystique around independent air control, the development of true cooperation between air and ground forces fell sadly by the wayside.

Later in October it was the turn of the WO to refurbish their case. The Secretary of State for War declared that he was

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1. Cab 4/18, CID Paper 903-B, Operations in the Sudan, December 1927 to February 1928. Despatch from the High Commissioner for Egypt and the Sudan enclosing a report by the Governor General of the Sudan dated 22 March 1928.
2. Ibid., CID Paper 904-B, Despatch by Lord Lloyd concerning memo by Sir John Maffey, 6 July 1928.
3. Ibid., CID Paper 911-B, Memos by Air Ministry and Air Staff, 11 October 1928.

by no means convinced that the presence of aircraft constituted any real safeguard against outbreaks amongst fanatical and ignorant people. Furthermore, there were certain areas of forest and thick bush where aircraft could not locate the enemy and where recognition of offenders could only be done on the ground.[1] Then at a meeting of the CID in December, Milne stressed again the importance of retaining an infantry garrison of at least 1½ battalions. It was agreed *inter alia* that the two British battalions should be retained for a further period of six months and the situation then reviewed.[2] By the end of that period the question of permanent accommodation for the RAF squadron at Khartoum had become a matter of some urgency. In late June Trenchard complained to the CID that the air force personnel had been living in hutted accommodation for almost two years and that he was unable to propose a scheme for barracks until he knew whether the Army units were to be withdrawn. Milne explained that it was impossible to put up firm proposals until the strength and position of the garrison had been decided.[3]

By November, however, the international situation had radically changed. Troubles in Palestine and uncertainties in the political situation between the Sudan and Egypt lent weight to the Army's concern for security at ground level. At a meeting of the CID the WO and Air Ministry found themselves in agreement for once over the retention of the full British garrison in the Colony "in view of unforeseen circumstances".[4]

But this agreement as to the size of the garrison did not put an end to controversy. In May 1936 the Air Staff were still complaining that the GOC had not used aircraft in accordance with the undertaking made in July 1927. The DDOps cited a number

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1. Cab 4/18, CID Paper 915-B, 29 October 1928.
2. Cab 2/5, CID 239th Meeting, 13 December 1928. Milne was appointed FM 30 January 1928.
3. Ibid., CID 243rd Meeting, 27 June 1929.
4. Ibid., CID 245th Meeting, 14 November 1929. In fact a reduction was made in ground troops in July 1930. A company of infantry was sent to Cyprus in order to ease the accommodation problems. See Cab 4/20, CID Paper 1010-B, Report by Secretary, 31 July 1930.

of incidents in which he alleged that aircraft had been wrongly or inefficiently employed. The solution, he claimed, was to remove the squadron from Army control.[1]

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But if the troubles in Palestine in 1929 helped to forge a measure of agreement between the two services in the Sudan, they served only to embitter relations within the Mandate itself. The Air Force control, initiated in 1922, had long rankled with the WO, and the ensuing commission of enquiry afforded them a welcome opportunity to reopen the issue.

For the Air Force, AVM H.C.T. Dowding, sent out to command the forces in Palestine and Trans-Jordan soon after the disturbances had begun, argued that the two infantry battalions which had been drafted in were required purely because of "abnormal conditions". The first priority was to make the police force sufficiently strong and efficient to deal with the normal duties of law and order. The Army spokesman, on the other hand, Brigadier W.G.S. Dobbie, claimed that Palestine had an external as well as an internal problem. For that reason alone the defence of the country should be entrusted to the Army rather than to the RAF. Indeed, he contended, aircraft were not suited to the duties required in Palestine. He told the Enquiry:

> Aeroplanes are really bluff. The only thing they can do is to drop bombs or to shoot with their machine guns and their action is extremely indiscriminate and the people of this country, I am sure, have now taken their measure, they now realise that they are bluff.[2]

In his view the normal garrison should be two British infantry battalions stationed at Haifa and Jerusalem, and a number of armoured cars.[3]

The Air Staff dubbed such comment "erroneous and

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1. Air 9/49, Folio 18, Note by DDOps on Status of the RAF in the Sudan, May 1936.
2. Cab 53/20, COS Paper 212, 12 December 1929, Annexure 1.
3. Ibid. Dobbie was then Commander, Cairo Brigade.

prejudiced".[1] The Commission, however, whilst not ruling on the thorny question of which service should be in command, concluded that for the duties of checking widespread disturbances and restoring order in Palestine, it had been clearly established that infantry were more effective than either aeroplanes or armoured cars.[2]

The following month Trenchard wrote to Dowding warning him that efforts were being made to make out that the Air Staff were "the villains of the piece" for the conditions then existing in Palestine. A great number of soldiers, as well as civilians, he complained, were making out that the Air Staff had persuaded Lord Plumer against his better judgment to scrap all the ground forces and run the whole show by air, thus paving the way for the recent riots. He continued:

> .. that lie .. would be broadcast in the press all over the world and do us a lot of harm and we should never be able to catch up ... the denial would never get the publicity that the accusation had got.[3]

The truth of the matter, he reminded Dowding, was that although the Air Staff had been pressed for reductions, they had always insisted that some ground forces should be retained. It had been Lord Plumer who had gone out to Palestine and recommended their complete withdrawal.[4]

This explanation is open to question, however. In April 1925, for example, following a decision to reorganise the security forces in Palestine and Trans-Jordan, Sir Herbert Samuel, High Commissioner for Palestine, had warned Mr. Amery, the Colonial Secretary, concerning the operational limitations of aircraft and armoured cars when used in a country such as

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1. Air 9/12, Item 33, Air Staff Note, 28 May 1930.
2. Cab 5/7, CID Paper 348-C, para.4, 27 June 1930.
3. Trenchard Papers, II/27/60, Trenchard to Dowding, 21 November 1929.
4. Ibid. Lord Plumer was High Commissioner for Palestine, 1925-1928.

Palestine. He had advised that, on the withdrawal of the last remaining regular army unit - a cavalry regiment - a small British military force, preferably of two companies of infantry, should again be stationed in the Mandate. This suggestion had been rejected by the Air Ministry.[1] In 1929, too, at the time of the troubles, Slessor recorded an interview with Trenchard in which the CAS admitted that the Air Staff had dropped their previous policy "too quickly and with insufficient protest". One of the reasons for this was that Lord Plumer was a Field Marshal and "one was never allowed to forget it". Had the Air Staff opposed Plumer's recommendations, then he would have threatened to resign, and this would have created an impossible position for the local Air Commodore.[2]

The New Year brought little comfort for the Air Staff. The High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir John Chancellor, pronounced in favour of retaining the two British battalions as part of the permanent garrison and advocated that the responsibility for public security be transferred from the Air Ministry to the WO.[3] This was followed by a letter from the Army Council complaining of a system by which they were asked to provide military reinforcements in a country for which they bore no responsibility. It was not, they contended, an arrangement which lent itself to "smooth working in practice". In the circumstances, they considered that the control of operations should be vested in the hands of a military commander under the direction of the WO.[4]

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1. Cab 5/7, CID Paper 348-C, Enclosure 5, Samuel to Amery, 19 April 1925, and Air Ministry to Samuel, 19 May 1925.
2. Air 9/19, Folio 11, 4 September 1929. These reductions brought large savings in expenditure, see graph opposite. According to Major General Sir Frederick Maurice, however, these savings were more than offset by the cost of sending ships and soldiers to restore order. See article entitled "Independence and its Limitations", *The Times*, 16 April 1930, and the Hollinghurst Papers, AC 73/23/33.
3. Cab 5/7, CID Paper 348-C, Enclosure 4, Despatch dated 17 January 1930. Chancellor was High Commissioner for Palestine 1928-1931.
4. Ibid., Enclosure 7, Letter from WO to Colonial Office, 20 February 1930.

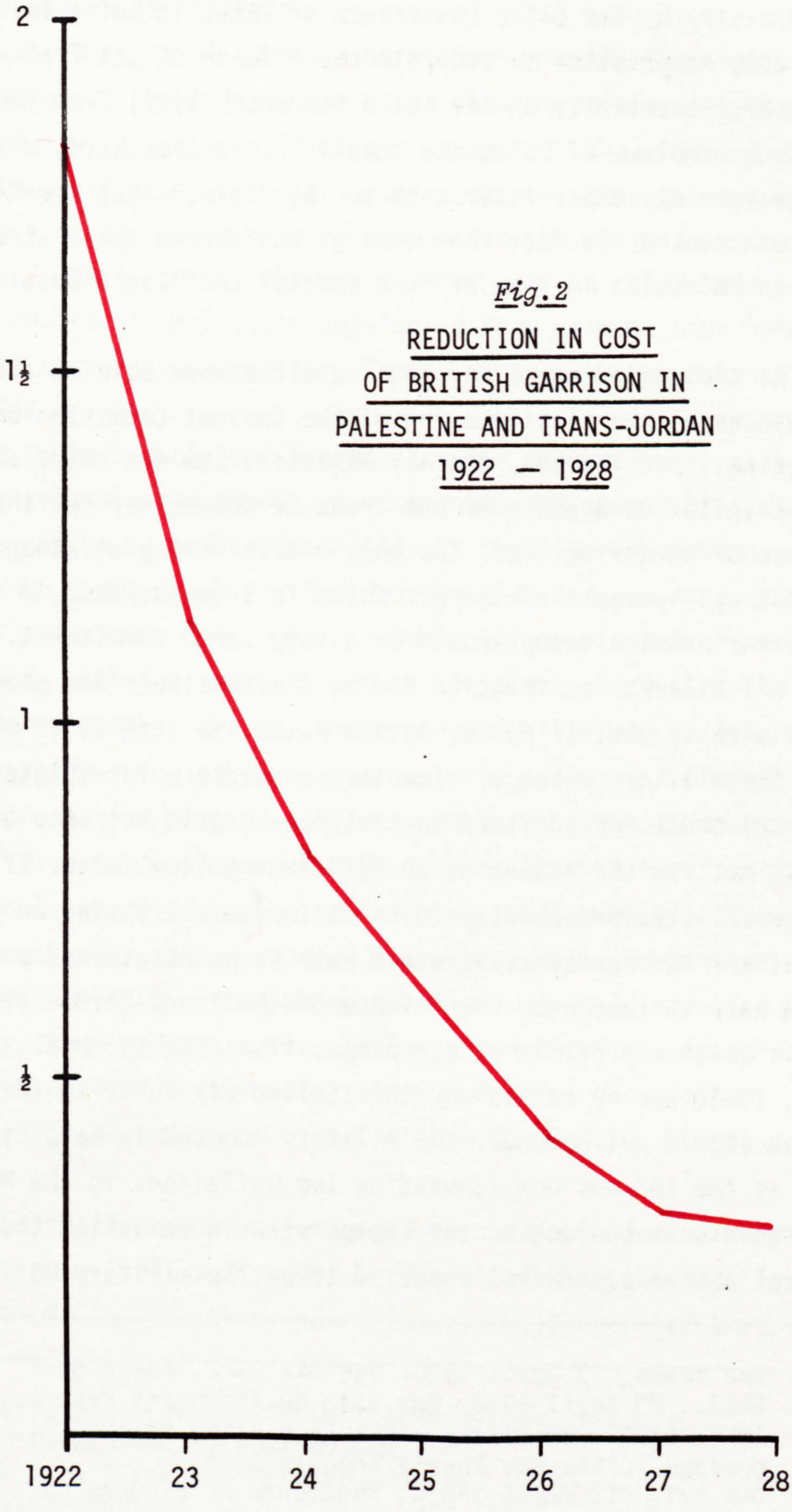

Fig. 2

REDUCTION IN COST
OF BRITISH GARRISON IN
PALESTINE AND TRANS-JORDAN
1922 — 1928

In replying to this argument in a letter to *The Times*, the former Air Minister, Sir Samuel Hoare, was quick to point out that the responsibility for Palestine had been imposed upon the Air Ministry by the Cairo Conference of 1921, it being felt difficult in practice to separate the defence of the Trans-Jordan frontier, essentially an Air Force responsibility, from the garrison problems of Palestine itself.[1] Lord Trenchard, writing to the same newspaper later that month, claimed that the RAF had always accepted the fact that some ground forces would have to be kept in Palestine in view of "the special conditions obtaining there".[2]

At the beginning of May both services were able to air their grievances at the first meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Palestine. Lord Thomson, the Air Minister, saw the chief danger as the influx of Arabs over the Trans-Jordan border for the purpose of murdering Jews. The only effective way of stopping ingress was by means of the air force in Trans-Jordan. To defend the frontier with troops would be a very large commitment. Up to date all attempts at invasion had been effectively and cheaply dealt with by the Air Force. As for Palestine itself, it was bad from the military point of view to use soldiers for maintaining internal order. He admitted that airpower could not keep order in towns, but saw the answer as an efficient police force. If responsibility for security in Palestine were transferred to the WO, either two headquarters would have to be maintained or the WO would have to take over the defence of the Trans-Jordan frontier, a task which was purely an air proposition. The War Minister, Shaw, could see no reason why the limited air force in Trans-Jordan should not be under the military command in Palestine, just as the AOC was now commanding two battalions in the Mandate. He argued that so long as the troops were in Palestine the natural centre of control appeared to be the military HQ in Egypt.[3]

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1. *The Times*, 17 April 1930. See Air 9/62, Folio 5.
2. Ibid., 23 April 1930. See also Hollinghurst Papers, AC 73/23/33. Trenchard had been elected to the peerage in the New Year's Honours List.
3. Cab 5/7, CID Paper 348-C, Enclosure 1, Minutes of 1st Meeting, Palestine Cabinet Committee, 1 May 1930.

Faced with such conflicting evidence, the Committee eventually agreed to refer this vexed question of military responsibility to the CID and recommended, in the meantime, that the existing garrison should be retained.[1]

At the meeting of the CID the following month the argument was resumed. On the wider theme, Lord Thomson pointed out that the Air Ministry had a definite air scheme for the whole of the Middle East. If some of their forces were now to be taken away, then his Ministry would have to reconsider the whole question of airpower in that part of the world. Shaw, on the other hand, saw future troubles in Palestine developing from within, thus making it essential for armed military forces outside the competence of the RAF.[2]

The Cabinet decision, announced later that month, resorted to the inevitable compromise. The strength and composition of the garrison was to be reviewed annually by the CID. Concerning control and command, it was decided that for defence against external attack the High Commissioner's principal advisor was to be the AOC, with all armed forces at his disposal. Whilst the AOC remained responsible for the employment of all armed forces, however, whether for external defence or support of the civil powers, the senior military officer was to be given the formal right of direct access to the High Commissioner on the question of internal security. It was to be understood, however, that all arrangements made as a result of such access were subject to consultation with the AOC. Major questions of administration were to be for the Air Ministry to settle in consultation with the WO, but for inspection and administration purposes, the military units were to be under the orders of the GOC British troops in Egypt.[3]

This fragile compromise managed to survive a further period of disorder in 1933, but proved inadequate during the more serious outbreaks of violence three years later. Unlike earlier troubles,

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1. Cab 5/7, CID Paper 348-C, Report of the Cabinet Sub-Committee, 27 June 1930.
2. Cab 2/5, CID 249th Meeting, 14 July 1930.
3. Cabinet Meeting 30 July 1930. See Cab 5/7, CID Paper 353-C, Note by Secretary, 31 July 1930.

which had been primarily anti-Jewish in origin, the riots of 1936 were directed mainly against the Government and established authority.[1] As such they necessitated substantial Army reinforcements and made inevitable the transfer of military power from the Air Ministry to the WO. In view of the steadily increasing number of soldiers in the Mandate - the equivalent of almost two divisions by early September - it is hardly surprising that the two departments had no difficulty in agreeing to this transfer "until such time as a return to normal conditions allowed a reconsideration of the future defence arrangements in Palestine".[2] Lt.General J.G. Dill assumed command of all British forces on the 15th September, just two days after his arrival.

It is worthy of note that three months before this date, at a time when the need for sizeable army reinforcements had not become too obvious, the AOC, AVM R.E.C. Peirse, one of the first graduates of the Imperial Defence College, had formed a Combined Staff with Colonel J.F. Evetts, OC British Troops, as his Chief of Staff. It could be argued that, in the circumstances then prevailing, Peirse saw this move as a means of retaining Air Force command of the garrison should matters not seriously worsen. It must be said, however, that this novel organisation was adopted with the entire agreement of the WO and was welcomed by the High Commissioner in the interests of continuity of command and experience. Furthermore, this experiment - introduced with the declared aim of making the best possible use of land and air forces - worked well and achieved something of a landmark in the somewhat barren field of inter-service cooperation.[3] From June onwards, mobile ground forces were organised at military centres with the express purpose of cooperating with an Air Striking Force. With the aid of radio vehicles, combined air and ground

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1. WO 32/4177, Despatch by AVM R.E.C.Peirse on Disturbances in Palestine, 19 April to 14 September 1936. Letter to Air Ministry dated 15 October 1936.
2. AVM E.L.Gossage, *The Royal Air Force*, p.85.
3. Air 9/19, Folio 53, Air Staff Note issued to press section, 11 September 1936. The Combined Staff was established on 7 June 1936.

attack was rapidly brought to bear upon guerrilla bands operating in the hill country. Such cooperation, in which the role of the aircraft was to locate and pin down the enemy until the infantry were ready to engage, reached a high standard of efficiency by the time that order had been restored in late October.[1]

Following this open rebellion, Air Force control of Palestine and Trans-Jordan was never restored. Air Commodore R. Hill, who was despatched to the Middle East earlier in the year to replace Peirse as the overall commander, found himself demoted *en route*. On arrival at Jerusalem he served as a supernumary until the departure of Peirse, when he assumed command of the RAF in Palestine and Trans-Jordan. His sister writes:

> So having started his journey as a General Officer C-in-C, he ended it with no job at all. [2]

The crisis of 1936 illustrated once again the ability of the two services to work closely together when the situation so demanded. It is somewhat ironic, however, that such cooperation should be achieved in a country where - as both departments agreed - the opportunities for close tactical coordination were severely limited. Furthermore, when the need did arise for such joint action, the two services were found to be sadly lacking in the specialised techniques of combined operations and were obliged to improvise. Indeed, it was not until the closing months of that very year that the first serious attempt was made to rectify this situation. It was made not in the hill country of Palestine, but in India, amid the more rugged terrain of the North West Frontier.

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1. WO 32/4177, Peirse to Air Ministry, 15 October 1936. Air Commodore C.F.A. Portal, speaking at the RUSI in the New Year (17 February 1937), referred to the "high state of perfection" reached during these operations. Speech reported in *The Aeroplane*, Vol.LII, 24 February 1937, p.219.
2. Prudence Hill, *To Know the Sky*, p.142.

PART II

THE ROLE OF AIRCRAFT IN IMPERIAL POLICING AND DEFENCE

Chapter 6

The Far East:
The North West Frontier of India
and the Defence of Singapore
November 1918 - October 1933

In November 1918 there were only two squadrons of aircraft in India and these, owing to the prior requirements of the Western Front, were equipped with obsolescent, if not obsolete, aircraft. Up to that time the employment of air forces in cooperation with the Army had never really been considered. In the spring of 1919, however, four additional squadrons were despatched to India and considerable use was made of aircraft during the period of internal disturbances which culminated in the troubles at Amritsar.[1]

The first realisation of how valuable aircraft could be in military operations came in May, however, with the outbreak of the 3rd Afghan War. Although most air action was confined to reconnaissance, several bombing attacks were made on military concentrations. Towards the end of the month Kabul itself was bombed and, in the opinion of the C-in-C India, General Sir Charles Monro, proved an important factor in producing a desire for peace on the part of the Afghan government.[2] No sooner had the war come to an end than hostilities in Waziristan gave further opportunity for aircraft to prove their worth. Little bombing was carried out in these operations, but much was achieved by way of close reconnaissance work. In December, a memo from the Brigadier General, Waziristan Force, to the OC 52nd Wing RAF read:

> It will be of satisfaction to your pilots and observers to know that their bold and dashing work has been a matter of general remark by the Infantry they are assisting and enheartening, and that the final defeat of the enemy will be due largely to the excellence of their work.[3]

Despite this increasing realisation of the value of aircraft for operational purposes on the part of Army commanders, however, the importance of the new arm was not as yet fully appreciated by the Government of India. During the remaining months of 1920

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1. Trenchard Papers, II/27/71/2, Memo, CAS to Secretary of State for Air, entitled "The Progress of the Development of Air Power in India", July 1925.
2. Ibid.
3. Hollinghurst Papers, AC 73/23/32, Appendix C, December 1919.

and for the first half of 1921, India and the frontiers were in a comparatively peaceful state and the air force was seldom called upon to assist the military forces in any operations. As a result, severe cuts were made in the Air Force budget and, during the summer of 1921, the RAF in India began to deteriorate steadily. In addition, bad accounting and a failure on the part of the Indian Government to appreciate the importance of maintaining adequate reserves led to an embargo being placed on all spares and a proposal to reduce the number of squadrons in the country. Towards the end of 1921 the RAF in India had almost ceased to exist as a fighting service. Liddell Hart wrote of this period:

> ... the slender air force of the Army in India was allowed to decay until by 1922 there were scarcely any serviceable machines and the personnel were rotting through discouragement and lack of practice.[1]

Such conditions notwithstanding, the Air Force continued to be confident of the potential of airpower on the Frontier. Amid renewed fears of a further conflict with Afghanistan, an Air Staff paper contended that if war did break out, operations using airpower as the primary arm would be sufficient to make the Amir sue for peace.[2] General Lord Rawlinson, Monro's successor as C-in-C India, was strongly critical of such a policy in the event of a rupture with Afghanistan. He wrote to Trenchard:

> I am opposed to any isolated baby bombing of this nature unless it is accompanied by definite military operations on the ground, and I

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 10/1930/100, Air Control in Practice, Part II, 24 May 1930. Relations between the personnel of the two services had also become strained. In general the airmen were young and lacked experience of the peace time manners and customs of the older services. "The result," wrote one observer, "was that the RAF became extremely unpopular with the Old Army in India, and was barred from service clubs and social functions." See *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XXIII, 6 September 1922, p.181.
2. Air 9/25, November 1921.

> have expressed these views to his Excellency the Viceroy.[1]

He informed Trenchard that he could see no reason at that time for increasing the establishment of the Air Force by two squadrons. The finances of India were in such a parlous state that he could not spend money on the Air Force unless the situation became critical.[2]

The CAS was not happy with the reference to "baby bombing" and told the C-in-C so in a letter dated 8th December. Aircraft alone, he claimed, could bring a war with Afghanistan to an end without the moving of one soldier, at half the cost, and without casualties. He continued:

> ... but I'm afraid you and the Army will never admit this, so I mean to move heaven and earth to try to get the air in India put on such a footing that we may have a chance of showing what we can do without being handicapped.[3]

If every big city in Afghanistan were attacked, maintained Trenchard, the whole of Afghanistan would accept peace well within the time that the C-in-C would take to mobilise his army, or at any rate within a few months of it. The appalling cost of two divisions from home to reinforce India in case of war with Afghanistan would be unnecessary if he were willing to pay the cost of the two squadrons.[4]

In the opinion of the Air Staff at this time, the misuse and abuse of airpower stemmed from the Air Force's lack of status in Indian affairs. That same month the Secretary of State for Air, Captain Guest, complained to Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India, that the Army was continually cutting down Air funds whenever they were short of money. He suggested that a senior officer be sent to India to report on the state of

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1. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/139, Rawlinson to Trenchard, 15 November 1921.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., Trenchard to Rawlinson, 8 December 1921.
4. Ibid.

affairs.[1] Meanwhile, at a meeting of the Sub-Committee on Indian military requirements, Trenchard pointed out that the AOC India had no right of direct access to the Indian Government and claimed that, as a result, the interests of the air service over the past three years had been sacrificed to military needs in a way which had proved seriously prejudicial both to the organisation and to the morale of the Air Force in India. He urged that the AOC be given the status of a Secretary to the Government of India, a post which would carry with it the right to direct access to the Viceroy on air matters.[2]

Such a suggestion brought an immediate rebuff from the General Staff. Wilson wrote to Rawlinson:

> ... I attach a delightful paper drawn up by the air people in which you will see they don't propose any longer to take orders from so an inferior person as yourself.[3]

In his reply, Rawlinson described Trenchard's proposal as "absolute nonsense". Then, anticipating that the Geddes Committee would abolish the independent Air Force, he added, "that will shut his mouth and prevent further action on his part".[4] To Trenchard he was no less blunt. The suggestion, he informed him, was "grotesque and quite impossible". He had not the slightest objection to Webb-Bowen going straight to the Viceroy, but seeing that the Viceroy knew absolutely nothing about anything to do with the Air, he would not take much interest in "Webb's conundrums".[5]

But the C-in-C India was not unsympathetic to the Air

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1. Air 8/40, Part II, Folio 1, Secretary of State for Air to India Office, 24 December 1921.
2. Trenchard Papers, CII/1/64, CID, IMR 28, Status of the RAF in India, 8 December 1921.
3. Wilson Papers, 13f/20, Wilson to Rawlinson, 10 December 1921.
4. Ibid., 13f/32, Rawlinson to Wilson, 4 January 1922.
5. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/139, Rawlinson to Trenchard, 5 January 1922. Air Commodore T.I. Webb-Bowen was then AOC Indian Group..

Staff's cause.[1] In the same letter he informed the CAS of his fight to save the Air Force in India. Then two weeks later, in a letter to Wilson, he explained how he had flatly refused to agree to the abolition of the air service and had "threatened to hand in my cap and jacket". He feared, however, that the two bomber squadrons would be abolished unless the COS and CID could prevent it.[2]

Meanwhile, Trenchard continued to press for an increase in air force strength. He informed a meeting of the Indian Military Requirements Committee that an addition of two bomber squadrons in India would be sufficient to enable an intensive bombing campaign to be carried out against Kabul and the other principal towns of Afghanistan, "on the assumption that the Army would not be moved across the frontier".[3] In that same month, however, a Sub-Committee chaired by the CIGS, whilst recommending that the RAF should be increased by two bomber squadrons, came down strongly against any reduction in ground forces. The Air Staff representatives felt obliged to issue a minority report maintaining that a very slight reduction in army units would be quite possible in order to allow for the maintenance of two additional squadrons.[4] Rawlinson supported the Committee's main findings. The frontier tribes, he stated in a letter to Wilson,

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1. This view was not shared by air enthusiasts. One wrote later that year:

   > The C-in-C in India, General Rawlinson, has apparently about as much understanding of the needs and uses of an Air Force as has the average Naval officer ...

   See *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol. XXIII, 6 September 1922, p.181.
2. Wilson Papers, 13f/36, Rawlinson to Wilson, 18 January 1922. It is pertinent that during the Great War Rawlinson, as Commander of the Fourth Army, reported most favourably upon the action of both fighters and bombers at the battle of Amiens. See Salmond Papers, AC 73/4, Memo on the Battle of Amiens.
3. Trenchard Papers, CII/1/67, Note by CAS entitled Aerial Action against Afghanistan, CID IMR 52, January 1922.
4. Air 8/40, Part 1, Folio 19. The Sub-Committee met at the WO on 12 and 24 January 1922.

scattered as they were over inaccessible mountains and with no permanent habitation except for dispersed and isolated mud villages, were not open to serious attack from the air.[1] In a letter a few days later he wrote:

> Hot air for Afghanistan and the tribes is no more use than a sick headache .. whatever good it may do in the flat open plains of Mesopotamia, and I shall oppose it tooth and nail.[2]

Lt.General Sir Walter Braithwaite, GOC-in-C Western Command, India, was no less scathing. He wrote to General Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd in April:

> I don't know what these Air people are at. Their schemes really sound so mad that either those responsible for them are mad, or else all the rest of us are entirely wrong and unable to appreciate the present possibilities of the air.[3]

By this time, however, there was little Air Force left to criticise. Trenchard told the Indian Requirements Committee at this juncture that the Air Force in India had only two weeks' power of operation.[4]

A more general appreciation of the Army's attitude towards airpower on the North West Frontier was afforded the following month when AVM Sir John Salmond, accompanied by Group Captain J.A. Chamier and Wing Commander F.E.T. Hewlett, was sent out to investigate and make recommendations upon the use of airpower in India. The mission was viewed with some apprehension by the General Staff even before it had departed. Cavan wrote to Trenchard early in May:

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1. Wilson Papers, 13f/39, Rawlinson to Wilson, 1 February 1922.
2. Ibid., 13g/2, Rawlinson to Wilson, 12 February 1922.
3. Montgomery-Massingberd Papers, 153, Braithwaite to Montgomery-Massingberd, 24 April 1922. Montgomery-Massingberd was then GOC 53rd (The Welsh Division) TA.
4. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/139, Letter Trenchard to Rawlinson 4 April 1922 refers.

> We are very anxious that they should not convey any sort of censure on the C-in-C or any officer now on the frontier.[1]

But the need for education, not censure, appears to have been uppermost in Salmond's mind. As Laffin points out, he saw his mission as "a crusade to educate the Army about proper cooperation with the air service and the intelligent use of its capabilities".[2] On arrival in India, Salmond reported that the need for such education was very real indeed. He informed Trenchard that Rawlinson was thoroughly opposed to giving the RAF more freedom of action.[3] In a later letter he complained:

> He is such a weathercock and so unreliable .. He will say something on the spur of the moment and at the back of his mind is the constant thought that an increase in the RAF will mean a decrease in the Army.[4]

He advised Trenchard that he was shortly to stay with the Viceroy and would prepare him against "the bitter and uncompromising attitude" being adopted by the C-in-C and his staff.[5] Later in the month he warned that everyone from Rawlinson downwards was prepared to resist most strenuously any further cuts. All appeared blind to the enormous power that the Air Force could wield on the frontier and beyond. His letter continued:

> ... we can of course demonstrate the cheapness of aircraft in action.. I cannot however shut my eyes to the fact that we must expect the most

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1. Air 8/40, Part 2, Folio 3, Cavan to Trenchard, 5 May 1922.
2. Laffin, op.cit., p.153. In his autobiography, Marshal of the RAF Sir Arthur Harris states that the moment it was known that Salmond was being sent out to investigate, the attitude of the Army High Command changed completely. "They obviously panicked," he wrote. See *Bomber Offensive*, p.20.
3. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/143/2, Salmond to Trenchard, 2 June 1922.
4. Ibid., 2 July 1922.
5. Ibid.

> uncompromising hostility from the Army authorities to proposals which can only be carried out at their expense.[1]

Inconsistent though he might appear to have been, however, Rawlinson's basic argument remained constant. He maintained that any success so far gained by the Air Force in Mesopotamia or elsewhere was no promise of like success in India. Indeed, he questioned the success of air control in Mesopotamia itself, seeing the comparatively peaceful conditions in that country as the direct result of the "hammering" which the Army had given the rebels in 1920.[2] Furthermore, the Army's attitude to the Air Force was doubtless coloured at this stage by the tendency of the Air Ministry to overplay their hand. Dyed-in-the-wool Generals were highly sceptical of theoretical schemes, especially when they were put forward by Salmond with such naive confidence. The potentiality of airpower was appreciated by the military in command, at least in part, but they were very wary lest they be dazzled by the bright hopes entertained by enthusiastic airmen. After meeting Salmond at a conference in Quetta in July, for example, Braithwaite wrote to Montgomery-Massingberd:

> ... we must be very careful not to discourage the RAF. There are such enormous possibilities in it. On the other hand we have got to stick out, tooth and nail, against wild cat theories, founded on insufficient data, which are advanced in all seriousness by the Air People and on which, taking their theories for proven facts, they want us to reduce the strength of the army in India and, no doubt, elsewhere.[3]

On the other hand, Salmond found some Army officers singularly lacking in any appreciation of airpower. After meeting Colonel

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1. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/143/2, Salmond to Trenchard, 21 July 1922.
2. Ibid., Letter, Salmond to Trenchard, 3 July 1922, refers.
3. Montgomery-Massingberd Papers, 153, Braithwaite to Montgomery-Massingberd, 14 July 1922.

Beddy and Colonel Brisket at Kohat in July, he wrote in his diary:

> From neither could I get an intelligent expression of their opinion regarding Air Action. They seemed unable to attempt to grasp an idea beyond their own particular horizons.[1]

By the beginning of August Salmond was writing up his report, well aware that the Army, having already suffered large reductions, would "fight like demons to retain every unit".[2] Rawlinson wanted to see more of what the Air Force could accomplish in Iraq before agreeing to any fundamental change in policy on the North West Frontier. The report, published later that month, recommended that the air service be given a definite and exhaustive trial as a punitive agent for the control of the border tribes. Salmond outlined a scheme whereby an air force of eight squadrons would take over control of a part of the frontier in supersession of ground troops. He argued that the present two schools of thought with regard to frontier policy were both expensive. The first was cheap in peace time, but necessitated an endless series of costly punitive expeditions when troubles broke out; the second entailed a very considerable outlay on the construction of roads, fortified posts and military stations. On the other hand, if the entire air force in India were employed against a frontier tribe, no more than 3,000 men would be involved. In such terrain, it had been suggested, targets would be impossible to obtain, but the key to the air scheme lay not in the destruction of people and material, but in the moral effect that could be obtained by sheer dislocation of living conditions.[3]

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1. Salmond Papers, AC 73/14, Entry for 12 July 1922.
2. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/143/2, Salmond to Trenchard, 8 August 1922. By this date the Indian Army had had its pre-war strength reduced by 1 British and 14 Indian cavalry regiments, 6 British and 17 Indian infantry battalions, 7 batteries and 1 pioneer battalion. Ibid., Salmond to Trenchard, 21 July 1922.
3. Salmond Papers, AC 73/14/6, August 1922.

Opposition to the scheme was varied and strong.[1] Major General L.R. Vaughan, Commandant of the Staff College, Quetta, was in favour of combined operations. He considered that the moral effect of bombing would decrease with use and that, as a follow up to air operations, the ground forces then existing in India would be the minimum required. Major General T.G. Matheson, GOC Waziristan, was likewise sceptical and argued that his district offered no comparison with Somaliland. He considered that air action on his border had been useful but not decisive. The GOC-in-C, Western Command, Lt.General Sir Walter Braithwaite, like Rawlinson, was strongly opposed to the reduction of one soldier in India until the efficacy of air control had been proved in Iraq. As far as Afghanistan was concerned, he argued that a popular war in a semi-civilised country was not brought to an end by merely causing the fall of the government by means of bombing. The destruction of the enemy's forces was the "natural and visible signs of the defeat of a nation". In his view the damage caused by bombing would bring no good or lasting results.

One commander was willing, however, to reduce army units in exchange for greater air support in order to give Salmond's scheme a trial. General Sir William Birdwood, C-in-C Northern Command, was prepared to withdraw one British and four Indian battalions from his forward area in exchange for two good RAF squadrons. This gesture was over-ruled by the C-in-C, but it showed willingness on the part of one military mind to allow the experiment of some other method.[2]

In his official comment on the report, Rawlinson held strongly to the view that the moment for any drastic change had not yet arrived. After very careful consideration of the potentialities and limitations of aircraft during the Great War in northern Russia and India, he was unable to accept the optimistic predictions set out in the report. Operations in support of these theories were suspect. In Somaliland,

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1. Salmond Papers, AC 73/14/6, Appendix VI, Opinions and Criticisms on the Scheme.
2. Ibid.

independent air action had lasted but three days and had resulted in the dispersal of the Mullah's forces. It was left to the Camel Corps to pursue the enemy and achieve the final disintegration of his forces. In Iraq, too, air control was in the experimental stage and it would not be for another year or eighteen months before conclusions could be drawn as to the value of the scheme.[1]

Private comment was not so restrained. According to Colonel J.D. Coleridge at HQ India, Salmond's recommendations were "the narrow utterances of a narrow man writing to order". They meant that the Air Force would do all that was required whilst the Army, suitably reduced, sat on the defensive. Such a one-sided report was unacceptable. What was required was cooperation. Air forces and ground troops would always win a war provided they were properly handled; ground troops alone would win but their success would take longer; air forces alone would never win.[2]

Such, indeed, may be regarded as the general consensus of opinion among the senior military staff in India at this time. Whilst commanders were strongly in favour of the Air Force and full of praise for the work it achieved, there was a widespread feeling that the report had to be "reduced within the realms of common sense".[3] In November, Rawlinson wrote again to Trenchard. Nothing would please him more, he explained, than if Salmond could demonstrate beyond doubt the power of the air force to preserve India's frontiers, for this would save a great deal of money and "our progress on the road to ruin will thereby be stayed". As it was, he could not afford to take unlimited risks. It was necessary to proceed with caution.[4]

In fact, this "progress on the road to ruin" was spelt out by Rawlinson in a letter to Lord Derby early in the New Year. He pointed out that nearly 50% of India's central revenues was

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1. Air 9/27, Section 2, Memo by Lord Rawlinson on Sir John Salmond's Report. Undated.
2. Montgomery-Massingberd Papers, 153, Coleridge to Montgomery-Massingberd, 3 September 1922.
3. Ibid., 22 November 1922.
4. Trenchard Papers, CII/27/139, Rawlinson to Trenchard, 13 November 1922.

spent on defence and that in the last four years expenditure had exceeded income by £80 million. This meant that "big military retrenchments" were necessary if bankruptcy were to be avoided.[1]

Opposition to the scheme on tactical grounds was also understandable to some extent. Slessor, always ready to see the other man's point of view, later agreed that in 1922 the Army commanders in India were being asked to take a great deal on trust. They had had a lifetime of experience of traditional warfare, most of which had never seen airpower in action.[2] Thus when the Government of India agreed to the addition of two bomber squadrons, as recommended by Salmond, on the understanding that a reduction was made in the 4th Field Army Division, Rawlinson would have none of it.[3] This conviction that the land forces should in no way be reduced was further strengthened by the failure of the Lausanne Conference and the continued threat of internal Moslem disorders.

But if Salmond failed to obtain a trial for his air scheme in Waziristan, his report did restore to efficiency the six RAF squadrons in India. The embargo on spares was lifted and the air service was gradually returned to fighting form.[4] Lt.General Sir John Shea, GOC Central Provinces District, wrote in November:

> Great efforts are being made to get the Air Force back to a state of efficiency; all indents have been placed, stores have commenced to arrive, and with any luck Webb-Bowen hopes to have two complete squadrons by December 1st and the whole six squadrons by the end of the financial year.[5]

The policy as to their employment, however, remained the same,

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1. Derby Papers, WO 137/3, Rawlinson to Derby, 11 January 1923.
2. Slessor, op.cit., p.36.
3. Air 5/413, Folio 22a, Air Staff Note, April 1926.
4. Trenchard Papers, II/27/71/1, Memo entitled The Progress of the Development of Air Power in India, para.5b.
5. Montgomery-Massingberd Papers, 153, Shea to Montgomery-Massingberd, 15 November.1922.

despite protest from the Air Staff that combined action tended to "belittle air action" and so lessen its effectiveness.[1] In January 1923, Major General W.D. Bird warned the readers of the *Army Quarterly* that it had yet to be proved that airmen could end a contest mainly by their unseconded exertions. It remained doubtful, too, whether they alone could defend a frontier against tribesmen or effectively garrison a dependency without military support.[2] Towards the end of the month the AOC India, AVM P.W. Game, gave "an indication of the general view" in a letter to Trenchard. He wrote:

> ... it seems to me that soldiers are for peaceful penetration, generally speaking, by road making and gradual occupation; that they are meanwhile prepared to try what the RAF can do but will require a good deal of ginger to make them go all out and that in their hearts they honestly believe we can never keep order for a long period on the border without ground expeditions to supplement our efforts.[3]

Bombing by the air force, Coleridge informed Montgomery-Massingberd the following month, was doing nothing miraculous but did "kill a cow or a sheep now and then".[4] On the same date a note from Game read:

> The policy of the Air Staff for the use of air forces against frontier tribesmen is not generally understood by the General Staff in India.[5]

It was in combination with ground forces that the Army saw the Air Force's real value. The GOC Wazirforce reported in May

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1. Trenchard Papers, CII/2/108, Air Staff Note on the Employment of the RAF on the North West Frontier, 1 January 1923.
2. *Army Quarterly*, Vol.V, January 1923, Article entitled "One Air Force or Three", p.352.
3. Trenchard Papers, II/27/71/1, Game to Trenchard, 25 January 1923.
4. Montgomery-Massingberd Papers, 153, Coleridge to Montgomery-Massingberd, 7 February 1923.
5. Trenchard Papers, II/27/71/1, Notes on Air Operations in Waziristan 1922-1923 by AOC India, 7 February 1923.

that the air force was a "very valuable adjunct" to his forces. When combined with active ground operations, the enemy realised that destruction from the air might shortly be followed by ground attack.[1] This view was reinforced by General Sir Claud Jacob, the CGS, later in the year. Under present conditions, he reported, and for an indefinite period in the future, aircraft should be considered as a most valuable and necessary adjunct to land forces rather than as the principal arm to which land forces would be auxiliaries. There was, too, he pointed out, a section of public opinion at home which denounced air operations against tribesmen. This opinion had to be taken into account when considering the feasibility and advisability of adopting such methods. He concluded:

> Even the staunchest adherents of an independent Air Force will recognise that withdrawal or undue weakening of the regular land forces in Waziristan would tend to consolidate tribal opposition against us .. the withdrawal of troops would be exaggerated into a tribal triumph, which would enhearten the Mahsuds to withstand to the utmost any coercion from the air.[2]

In the opinion of the Air Staff in India, however, such statements belied the facts. Group Captain J.A. Chamier, a member of HQ Staff, advised Trenchard that "the responsible authorities" were steadily coming to recognise that the RAF was the only solution to the frontier problems short of complete occupation. There was a constant demand for air action but, he added, "we cannot perhaps expect Army HQ to admit officially on paper our powers so long as that admission may result in loss of battalions - however much their practice is an open confession of the correctness of our claims."[3]

The opportunity for the RAF to prove their worth as an

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1. Air 5/248, Note by Major General Sir Torquhil Matheson, GOC Wazirforce, 10 May 1923.
2. Montgomery-Massingberd Papers, 140/3, General Staff Note on Waziristan, para.18, 17 September 1923.
3. Trenchard Papers, II/27/63/2, Chamier to Trenchard, 31 July 1924.

independent force came the following Spring. The AOC, AVM Sir Edward Ellington, was assigned the task of subduing four tribes in revolt. This he did without the use of ground troops in operations lasting six weeks. At the end of this period the tribes came in, amongst those who submitted being several sections who had previously never entered into relations with the Government. Total expenditure was £75,000 compared with Army operations costing £900,000 during the period 1923-24.[1] So successful did he consider these operations to be, that Ellington wrote to his Chief:

> I have just seen the C-in-C who seems very pleased with the results of the operations .. we seem to have at last convinced the Powers that Be that we can do what we claimed... The C-in-C is prepared to press strongly for the provision of the two additional squadrons and is considering what savings he can effect towards their cost.[2]

The following month Trenchard wrote to congratulate Jacob on his support. "It occurs to me," he wrote, "that in our discussions in the old days, although you did not perhaps altogether go as far as I did in my claims for the air, yet you often used to see greater possibilities in their use than others at that time ..."[3]

But such euphoria on the part of the Air Force was short-lived. Just a few days later Ellington was warning Trenchard that, in view of the growing Bolshevik menace, Jacob was determined not to reduce the Army.[4] Then a few days later the

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1. Trenchard Papers, II/27/71/2, Memo: The Progress of the Development of Air Power in India, paras.7 and 9, July 1925.
2. Ibid., II/27/63/2, Ellington to Trenchard, 5 May 1925. In fact it was not until February 1927 that the Viceroy's Council finally agreed to increase the Air Force by two squadrons. See Air 5/413, Folio 50A, Chamier to CAS, 10 February 1927.
3. Ibid., II/27/102, Trenchard to Jacob, 11 June 1925. General Sir Claud Jacob was appointed C-in-C India 3 April 1925.
4. Ibid., II/27/63/2, Ellington to Trenchard, 16 June 1925. See also Air 5/413, Folio 16A.

Air Staff's hopes were dealt a serious blow with the publication of Jacob's report on the independent air operations. Whilst praising the work of the air service, the C-in-C came down heavily against the future use of such tactics. He wrote:

> Satisfactory though the results of these operations have been, I am of the opinion that a combination of land and air action would have brought about the desired result in a shorter space of time, and next time action is to be taken, I trust that it will be possible to employ the two forces in combination. [1]

The CAS was angered by this report and later that year used the deliberations of the Colwyn Committee to make a bitter reprisal. Referring to this report, he told the Committee:

> There you have the bias of a soldier's mind which believes that the proper place for aircraft is merely for spotting and reconnaissance and keeping the air clear from attacks against the soldiers on the ground. [2]

Meanwhile, at the request of the Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead, the Air Ministry prepared a scheme of air control for the North West Frontier. In a covering letter Sir Samuel Hoare was at pains to point out that the Air Ministry had no desire to "edge the WO out of their responsibilities". On the other hand, in view of the experience gained in air control both in Iraq and on the North West Frontier over the past three years, it was essential that the Air Force's case be reviewed.[3]

Trenchard anticipated that the scheme would create "a great deal of controversy with the Army and the CIGS".[4] He was right. The following May the proposals came in for severe criticism

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1. Trenchard Papers, II/27/18, Extract from Despatch on RAF Operations in India, March to April 1925, Enclosure 1, Letter from General Sir Claud Jacob, C-in-C India, 29 June 1925.
2. Ibid., II/22, Chapter V, CAS to Colwyn Committee, Evidence and Report, 1925-1926.
3. Ibid., II/27/39, Hoare to Birkenhead, 9 July 1925.
4. Air 5/413, Folio 10, CAS to Secretary of State for Air, 3 July 1925.

from the DCGS, Major General Walter Kirke. Referring to the Air Force's independent action of April-May 1925, he argued that these operations afforded no reliable guide with which to estimate the effect of air action when the tribes as a whole meant business. The policy in India was one of pacification, not punishment. No reliance could be placed on local levies unless regular troops were within supporting distance. Furthermore, it was extremely difficult to find landing grounds and, in the event of hostilities, these would be useless unless regular troops could be moved up to protect them. Thus without the use of good roads and columns, the air scheme would become "a modern and possibly improved variation of the old policy of 'burn and scuttle' which the Government of India has abandoned". By such schemes the field army was being deprived of "the vital assistance of air cooperation".[1] Nor was Kirke convinced of the deterrent value of airpower. In a private letter the following month he wrote:

> In fact Waziristan has never been so quiet and the RAF have the sublime impertinence to try and claim all the credit because they squashed a few villages and inflicted eleven casualties .. [2]

Once again Chamier sent home words of comfort. Kirke, he explained to the DOI, Air Commodore C.L.N. Newall, was a reactionary of the deepest blue. He was ignorant of the Frontier except for one "Cook's tour". Their "nice little war" last year had shown that the Air Force had the power to coerce tribes who were thoroughly accustomed to bombing. The Frontier was quieter than ever before and both the Chief Commissioner and the Resident in Waziristan attributed this mildness in great part to the fear of the aeroplane. The letter concluded:

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1. Air 5/413, Folio 24A, Note by DCGS India on proposals for air control of the North West Frontier, 16 May 1926.
2. Montgomery-Massingberd Papers, 155, Kirke to Montgomery-Massingberd, 10 June 1926.

> You need not think that Kirke's views are those of the Government of India; it is very much the opposite and we are their blue-eyed boys at the moment.[1]

Chamier's criticism of Kirke was not wholly justified. It is certainly true that the DCGS was opposed to so-called "independent air action" - that type of operation in which the air force bombed vital targets while the ground forces remained tamely on the defensive - but he had frequently made it clear that he was fully in favour of closer tactical cooperation between the two arms.

The possibility of obtaining such cooperation came nearer to fulfilment the following spring when, once again, there were renewed fears that the Soviet Union was about to invade Afghanistan. Contingency plans revealed not only an unusual divergence of opinion between the British and Indian General Staffs, but an equally unusual degree of agreement between the CIGS and the CAS as to the tactics to be adopted. In the deliberations of the Defence of India Sub-Committee, established by the CID in March 1927 to consider the integrity of Afghanistan and the means of countering Russian aggression,[2] a proposed plan of campaign, compiled jointly by the two Service Chiefs, was remarkable both for the closeness of the cooperation it prescribed and for the advanced nature of the tactics it proposed.[3]

In presenting this combined plan to the Committee in April, Milne explained that on the northern line, around the vicinity of Kabul, action was to be confined to "a continuous offensive by the RAF supported and exploited by Afghan military forces". On the southern line, however, where the aim was to drive the

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1. Air 5/413, Folio 38A, Chamier to Newall, 30 November 1926.
2. Cab 2/5, CID 223rd Meeting, 17 March 1927.
3. This plan was based on "An Appreciation of the Military Situation in the event of a war with Russia in Central Asia", compiled jointly by the CIGS and CAS. See Cab 16/83, DI 3 and DI 3a, 25 March and 21 April 1927 respectively. For a sketch map of Afghanistan see overleaf.

Fig.3

Russians back by means of a vigorous offensive, operations were to be carried out "by a force of bombing aircraft adequately supported by a mechanised force". Trenchard, speaking at the same meeting, maintained that in the northern sector aircraft had the initial part to play in heading the Russians off Kabul, whilst in the south the proposed air action would stop the Russians from "digging themselves in" and, in addition, would give a great moral boost to the Afghans themselves. On the other hand, he readily conceded that aircraft alone could not expel the Russians from northern Afghanistan. Air action could prevent the Russians from

developing their communications and creating bases, but their actual expulsion could only be effected by the army.[1]

The plan, approved by the Committee the following month,[2] ran counter to the views of the General and Air Staffs in India. The CGS, Lt.General Sir Andrew Skeen, argued that because of the physical features along the frontier, the full integrity of Afghanistan was not essential for the defence of India. Furthermore, his staff considered that it was impossible to avert Russian control and development of the northern provinces. The Afghans should be assisted to hold Kabul, but any attempt to expel the Russians would impose very serious strains on the endurance of both Britain and India. In this he was supported by the Indian Air Staff, who claimed that in maintaining the integrity of India's frontiers it was only necessary to retain the southern portions of Afghanistan.[3]

This schism between the Staffs at home and in India - the result of what Lord Birkenhead termed "an extraordinary disparity"[4] - makes the close liaison achieved between the CAS and CIGS the more remarkable. The fact that neither service had the necessary equipment nor the necessary training to put their combined plan into effect, cannot detract from the signal measure of unanimity reached between the two departments.[5] But the paper promises of a more constructive approach to combined operations along the North West Frontier were not to be translated into practical terms once the major threat - that posed by the Soviet Union - had subsided.[6]

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1. Cab 16/83, CID Defence of India Sub- Committee, Minutes of 3rd Meeting, 26 April 1927.
2. Ibid., 7th Meeting, 24 May 1927.
3. Ibid., 5th Meeting, 10 May 1927. For a fuller report of this dispute see Gibbs, op.cit., pp.826-27.
4. Cab 16/83, 7th Meeting, 24 May 1927.
5. In April 1927 the Indian Field Army amounted to 4 divisions and 4 cavalry brigades, plus 6 RAF squadrons in the throes of reorganisation. Estimated Soviet strength was 25,000 sabres, 75,000 rifles, and 400 guns. Ibid., 3rd Meeting, 26 April 1927.
6. Russian influence in Afghanistan was severely weakened in 1928 by the overthrow of Amir Amanullah and his replacement by the pro-British Nadir Shah. The relations between the two services in India in the 1930s are dealt with in Chapter 7 of this work.

Further south in Asia, the threat to the British Empire was of a different kind. Here the likely enemy was seen as Japan, and the major fear was of a sudden seaborne attack upon the naval base at Singapore.

The part that aircraft could play in the defence of such bases had exercised the minds of the CID and COS Sub-Committee from the early 1920s. A weak compromise solution as to which service should command a defended port was agreed in December 1923, as noted earlier,[1] but the relative importance of airpower in the protection of such bases could not be so easily shelved, and became the subject of a long and bitter air-versus-gun controversy centred on the defence of Singapore.

The main lines of argument in this dispute have been well traced and documented elsewhere.[2] Certain aspects of this controversy, however, are particularly pertinent to this present work in that they serve to illustrate the fact that the controversy was not merely or primarily a disagreement between the Naval and Air Staffs over the protection of á naval base. The Army, the service responsible for the island's main armament, was deeply involved in the dispute and, indeed, was often the leading protagonist against the claims of the Air Staff. Lord Beatty's lament to his wife in January 1924, that the "infernal name of Singapore" would be for ever engraved on his heart,[3] was a *cri de coeur* which could well have been uttered by Cavan and Milne. Throughout the long dispute their opposition was certainly as forthright and persistent as that of the Chief of Naval Staff.

At a meeting of the COS in July 1925, for example, the CIGS, General Lord Cavan, reminded his colleagues that the ultimate defence of Singapore was a military responsibility.

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1. Cab 53/1, COS 4th Meeting, 4 December 1923.
2. See in particular Major General S. Woodburn Kirby, *Singapore, Chain of Disaster*; Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, Vol.I, p.289 ff; and article by W.David McIntyre, "The Strategic Significance of Singapore", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol.10, No.1, March 1969, p.69.
3. Boyle, op.cit., p.551. Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty was First Sea Lord 1919-1927.

Once a landing had been established and the base was in enemy hands, the situation could only be dealt with by "military measures".[1] A year later it was his successor, General Sir George Milne, who took the lead in proposing a *modus vivendi*. He suggested that the provision of defensive measures should be divided into three stages with a review of the situation at the end of the first stage. If by that time, he pointed out, the development of the air scheme had become sufficiently convincing, then the CID would be free to adopt it with little financial loss involved.[2] At this juncture, Trenchard would not accept such a proposal, but at the next meeting, presided over by Premier Baldwin, he did agree to this suggestion provided that certain provisions were met.[3]

The agreement, formally acknowledged by the COS and CID the following month,[4] was provisional by nature and only served to postpone the settlement of the basic issue dividing the Service Chiefs. At the end of 1928 the controversy - which had been simmering throughout the intervening period[5] - boiled over once again, with the Army and Air Force as the major protagonists. This fresh outbreak was centred around gunnery trials which had

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1. Cab 53/1, COS 21st Meeting, 3 July 1925.
2. Ibid., COS 34th Meeting, 22 June 1926.
3. Ibid., COS 35th Meeting, 6 July 1926. Trenchard, unable to produce a tenable air scheme at this stage, conceded his case in a letter to Beatty dated 6 July 1926. See Trenchard Papers, II/27/16.
4. Cab 5/6, Report by COS, CID Paper 273-C, 9 July 1926, and Cab 2/4, CID 215th Meeting, 22 July 1926.
5. During 1927, for example, a similar air-versus-gun controversy had emerged over the provision of coastal defence in South Africa. Here, the Air Staff claimed that apart from aircraft being more efficient and economical for coastal defence, they could also be of value for internal security. The matter was deferred indefinitely. For a summary of the arguments advanced by the Air Ministry and WO, see Cab 53/14, COS Paper 116, Memo by CAS (Enclosure 2) dated 29 November 1927, and Memo by CIGS (Enclosure 4) dated 15 November 1927. An account of this particular controversy is given in the unpublished thesis by H.G. Welch, The Origins and Development of the COS Sub-Committee of the CID, 1923-1939, University of London, 1973, pp.87-89.

been conducted by the WO at Malta and Portsmouth earlier in the year. At a meeting of the CID in December, the Secretary of State for War, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, frankly admitted that hits by the 9.2 inch batteries had been "few and far between", and suggested that the installation of these guns at Singapore, and that of the 15 inch, should be postponed pending further trials. Trenchard, encouraged by this admission, asked that the Air Ministry be supplied with a copy of the report on the trials. This Milne bluntly refused to do. The report, he pointed out, was not fit for circulation because the WO had not yet ascertained whether the fault of the coastal defences lay with the operators, the guns, or the observation. Pressed further by the Air Minister, who reminded the CIGS that aircraft had taken part in the trials, Milne literally "stuck to his guns". He argued that an investigation was to be conducted by the Master General of Ordnance and that this would probably take a year to complete. Hoare retorted that, in his opinion, the Air Ministry was entitled to see a copy of the report. In this he was supported by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill, who was strongly opposed to the COS keeping "tactical secrets" from each other.[1]

In fact, a summary of the reports of these trials was made available to the COS when they met in the New Year.[2] At this meeting Trenchard claimed that all the arguments he had raised four or five years ago in connection with the employment of aircraft in coastal defence had been clearly borne out by the trials. Milne, however, reminded the CAS of his undertaking not to reopen the air-versus-gun controversy until the second stage of the Singapore programme was up for consideration. The experiments at Malta and Portsmouth, he insisted, had not been ordered in connection with that question and had only been meant as "preliminary trials". If he had thought that these trials would be "seized upon" and their results used in the air-versus-gun controversy, he would never have allowed them to be held with untried instruments and inferior personnel. Owing to the

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1. Cab 2/5, CID 239th Meeting, 13 December 1928.
2. Cab 53/17, COS Paper 182, 3 January 1929.

very severe conditions in which they had taken place, these trials contained no argument that could be used in connection with that controversy.[1]

In June, at a long meeting of the COS presided over by the Prime Minister, Trenchard expounded at length the case in favour of the aerial torpedo and the bomb. He maintained that these weapons could hit their targets more frequently than guns at ten times the range. For his part, Milne complained that the CAS had merely confined himself to pulling to pieces a very able and perfectly fair statement of fact in regard to the performance of coastal defence guns. When, he asked, was the CAS going to prove what air action could do? If the Air Force could make out a better case, it was not for the WO to decide between the two. In the meantime the Army would continue its experiments.[2]

By this time, however, the completion of the defence works had been postponed to 1930,[3] and in November of that year were further postponed until 1936.[4] As Hankey pointed out, the inability to reach a settlement on this question reacted upon the defences of all other bases.[5] In May 1932 a report by a CID Sub-Committee, appointed the previous December to examine the whole coast defence situation, found that whilst there was agreement between the three services as to the value of aircraft in coastal defence, beyond that point there was "a great divergence of opinion". The Committee, chaired by Baldwin, felt unable to recommend the substitution of aircraft for medium and heavy guns in view of "the many uncertain factors in the problem". In the opinion of its members, the solution lay elsewhere:

> We consider that if a change should become desirable on technical grounds it is far more likely to be brought about as a result of mutual cooperation

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1. Cab 53/3, COS 76th Meeting, 14 January 1929.
2. Ibid., 78th Meeting, 11 June 1929.
3. The postponement was approved by the Cabinet 19 December 1928. See Cab 5/7, CID Paper 346-C, 4 June 1930.
4. Cab 55/5, JP 51, 12 November 1930.
5. Cab 53/3, COS 97th Meeting, 26 January 1931.

than by controversial methods.[1]

But these "controversial methods" continued to be advanced. In October 1933, for example, a draft copy of an Air Staff paper on the employment of aircraft in coastal defence angered the CIGS, General Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd. He complained to Hankey that it only gave one side of the picture. He was trying his best, he wrote, to keep the peace with the Air Force, but he was being sorely tried. The letter concluded:

> It seems to me that in these critical times for the three services it is little short of criminal not to work together, but if documents of this sort are issued to officers of one of the services in the face of the cabinet decision, real cooperation is hopeless. [2]

It was to be expected, however, that the Air Staff would find it difficult to accept the enforced arrangement of June 1932. Joubert - at this time Commandant of the Staff College - later complained that, as a result of this compromise, the major portion of the money available was sunk in guns and concrete and only a pittance allowed for the aircraft needed to defend Singapore.[3] Such indeed was the case. Furthermore, once installed, the guns which had generated so much heated controversy in time of peace, fell to the Japanese without firing a shot in time of war. Slessor, however, takes a more realistic view. He points out that such a compromise was as inevitable as it was unsatisfactory. Without a gilt-edged guarantee from the Air Ministry that aircraft would be available at Singapore in time of need, it was not unreasonable on the part of the WO and the Admiralty to oppose Trenchard's flexible air scheme, irrespective of their total lack of faith

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1. Cab 5/7, CID Paper 370-C, Report of Sub-Committee on Coastal Defence, 24 May 1932. Baldwin was then Lord President of the Council.
2. Cab 21/359, Montgomery-Massingberd to Hankey, 20 October 1933.
3. Joubert, op.cit., p.114.

in aircraft as a viable substitute for coastal gun defences.[1] On this latter point, too, Lord Templewood himself concedes that, in this particular instance, the Air Force of that day had not the aircraft in sufficient number or power to substitute air for ground forces. It was hardly surprising, he admits, that his colleagues on the CID "refused to depend on faith without visible works".[2]

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1. Slessor, op.cit., p.75.
2. Templewood, op.cit., p.265.

PART II

THE ROLE OF AIRCRAFT IN IMPERIAL POLICING AND DEFENCE

Chapter 7

The Effect of Trenchard's "Last Will and Testament" on the Substitution Issue November 1929 - September 1939

The dispute over substitution in both the Middle and Far East was seriously exacerbated in November 1929 with the publication of Trenchard's Cabinet paper on the employment of airpower in Imperial Defence. It was hardly a propitious moment in which to advocate formally the "systematic and progressive extension of air control" in the North West Frontier of India, the Sudan, British Africa, and coastal defence.[1] Such proposals, so resolutely advanced, served only to heighten the tension which already existed between the two services over their respective roles in Empire defence and policing. At this particular juncture - as already noted - the Army was busily engaged in trying to regain command in Iraq and Aden; opposing an increase of airpower in India and the Sudan; condemning the system of air control in Palestine; and defending their role in the defence of Singapore.[2] Amid such a welter of controversy the WO saw the Cabinet paper as yet another attempt, both direct and deliberate, to bring about a reduction of their overall strength and commitment.

In his own paper to the Cabinet, the War Minister announced that his military advisors were in complete disagreement with the proposals, particularly in view of the recent failure of air control in Palestine. As to the question of economy, he was of the opinion that substantial savings

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1. Air 8/45, Part I, Item 6, CP 332(29) November 1929. For resumé and discussion of this paper see Slessor, op.cit., pp.70-75. For a spirited apologia of air control see Slessor's article, "Air Control: The Other Point of View", Slessor Papers, VD, May 1931.
2. At this time, too, a proposal by the Air Ministry to mechanise part of the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force sparked off a short but lively dispute over the mechanisation of native units. The WO contended that this was against long-standing policy and would react unfavourably upon other areas of the Empire, particularly India and Egypt. No firm decision was reached. For principal details see Cab 53/3, COS 84th Meeting, 4 November 1929; Cab 2/5 CID 245th Meeting, 14 November 1929; and Cab 23/62, Cabinet Meeting, 51(29), 3 December 1929.

could be made without loss of efficiency by reconsidering the constitution of the RAF as a separate service.[1] This reference to their independent status evoked a swift and lengthy reply from the Air Ministry. If this old sore were to be perpetually reopened whenever national problems of defence were being discussed, the Secretary of State for Air complained, then no progress could ever be made along the lines laid down by the Geddes and Colwyn reports. He urged his colleagues to keep any enquiry free from what he termed "the embittering echoes of an an irrelevant and exploded controversy".[2]

Within his own staff, however, Trenchard's "Last Will and Testament" was not viewed favourably by all. There was, too, some divergence of opinion as to the best means of putting the proposed measures into practice. Slessor, who had assisted in the drafting of the paper, was later to admit that he had entertained doubts as to the wisdom of such a move, arguing that so important had the air arm become in these areas that an extension of airpower and the introduction of some form of air control might well have come about in the natural course of events.[3] In a note to the CAS, Mr.C. Bullock, the Air Minister's private secretary, warned that the setting up of an enquiry might well enable to two senior services to reopen the question of a separate Air Ministry. The WO, he advised, might even try to reclaim Iraq and Aden, let alone Palestine. He continued:

> .. the Admiralty and WO will be able to drag in countless red herrings and so enlarge the field and fog the committee that, as has happened before, they might give up the task in despair and we should have made no progress whatever.[4]

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1. Air 8/45, Part I, Item 7, CP 356(29), 7 December 1929. The Admiralty took a similar line. Ibid., Item 10, 20 December 1929.
2. Ibid., Item 9, CP 365(29), 16 December 1929.
3. Slessor, op.cit., p.74, and Liddell Hart Papers, 1/644, Slessor to Liddell Hart, 18 July 1965.
4. Air 8/45, Part I, Item 11, Bullock to CAS, 21 December 1929.

In a similar note to the Secretary of State for Air, Bullock warned that "the friction would be appalling". He suggested that the Air Ministry should emphasise that they were merely giving effect to the recommendations of the Geddes and Colwyn Committees and were not "throwing in an apple of discord of our own quarrelsome initiative".[1]

Assistant Secretary C.G. Evans, on the other hand, was not in favour of using the Geddes and Colwyn Committees as a platform. He felt this might enable the WO and Admiralty to "turn our flank" by suggesting that greater economy could be gained under a dual rather than a triple system of administration.[2] Meanwhile, on the question of priority, a memo by Squadron Leader J.C. Slessor advised that in the first instance the Air Staff claims should be confined to two areas: the North West Frontier of India and British East Africa. In the former he felt that the saving of no less than £2 million a year made the Air Ministry's case "unanswerable"; in the latter, he argued that as "pro-rationalisation" was a live issue in that area, it was an appropriate time in which to advocate a defence scheme based on air control.[3]

As far as the matter of command was concerned, however, there was no dissension within the Air Staff. A memo by Trenchard just before he gave up office had made it clear that in any extension of air control the Air Ministry had to retain full responsibility:

> It must be observed that each successive scheme of air control has been inaugurated

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1. Air 8/45, Part II, Item 3A, Bullock to Secretary of State for Air, 31 December 1929.
2. Ibid., Evans to CAS, 9 January 1930.
3. Ibid., Note by Slessor, then on staff of DOI, 30 December 1929. Early in the New Year, however, in a letter to the new CAS, Trenchard advised against advocating India as one of the first areas for substitution on the grounds that it would be particularly difficult to obtain a reduction in ground forces along the North West Frontier. Ibid., Trenchard to Salmond, 8 January 1930.

> in spite of the gravest misgivings and the strenuous opposition of the great majority of Army Staff officers and commanders concerned; the forecasts of failure and disaster have been frequent. It may well be asked whether this is the school of thought from which the commanders for these schemes are to be chosen. [1]

By March the row over the substitution paper had resolved itself into a renewed struggle as to the part to be played by airpower along the North West Frontier of India. At a meeting of the Cabinet at the beginning of the month, the Prime Minister ruled that it would be a mistake to reopen *ab initio* the question of a separate Air Ministry, but he did agree that an enquiry should be held into substitution on agreed terms of reference.[2] By the end of the month such agreement had been reached and a CID Sub-Committee appointed "to examine and report in the light of experience in Iraq and other theatres on the practicability of the extended use of air control in substitution for other arms in Indian defence".[3]

In the meantime the controversy had been debated in the House of Lords, where the former CIGS, Lord Cavan, took Lord Trenchard to task for having submitted his proposals direct to the Cabinet. He argued that the matter of substitution was a question of pure strategy and, as such, should have first been submitted to the CID and then referred to the COS Sub-Committee. Furthermore, he called for an enquiry into bombing. In his view this was an indiscriminate weapon which affected the innocent and guilty alike. Viscount Plumer, a Field Marshal and former High Commissioner for Palestine, endorsed these views. The air arm, he claimed, was an essentially offensive and "mischievous power" and could not possibly provide the civilising influence which was required in many parts of the Empire. More was needed

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1. Air 8/45, Part I, Item 12, 30 December 1929.
2. Cab 23/63, Cabinet Meeting 13(30), Conclusion 4, 5 March 1930.
3. Air 8/45, Part II, Hankey to Secretary of State for Air, 31 March 1930, refers.

than merely passive acquiescence to authority based on threat. He concluded:

> It is false economy to incur any expenditure for the maintenance of public security unless it is quite certain, humanly speaking, that the measures adopted would be such as to ensure permanent pacification or at any rate a basis for it.[1]

Lord Lloyd, a former Governor of Bombay, opposed the proposals as they affected the North West Frontier. In this area, he maintained, British occupation and peaceful penetration had put a stop to all raiding. To advocate the substitution of what inevitably must mean "an impersonal and inhumane agency" whose only weapon was intimidation and punishment would have the most damaging effect upon Britain's reputation throughout the East.[2] Such views were not shared, however, by the military correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph*, Captain Liddell Hart. In a series of three articles he clearly favoured substitution. For the soldier and sailor, he prophesied, the future was "a narrowing horizon". A possible answer lay in some form of combined General Staff.[3]

Meanwhile, in India itself, the Army was preparing to fight for its future. In a letter to his brother, the CAS, in May, AM Sir Geoffrey Salmond, AOC India, warned that, pending the enquiry, the military were "wary over everything dealing with the frontier". Later that month he complained that the position of the Air Force in India was "little short of a scandal". He had informed the CGS that the whole of the Army on the Frontier was "pre-air" and that no modification in the distribution of troops had been made as a result of the advent of airpower.[4]

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1. Debate in House of Lords, *Hansard*, Vol.77, Cols.31-44, 9 April 1930. See also Air 9/62, Folio 2; *The Times*, 10 April 1930, and Hollinghurst Papers, AC 73/23/33.
2. Ibid.
3. Liddell Hart Papers, 10/1930/99-101, 23, 24 and 27 May 1930.
4. Air 9/27, AOC India to CAS, 17 and 30 May 1930. ACM Sir John Salmond was appointed CAS 1 January 1930.

The following month, Milne used the enquiry to launch an all-out denunciation of substitution, not only as it affected India, but across the whole spectrum of imperial defence.[1] His most scathing criticism was directed against the Air Ministry's first air control scheme in Iraq. Such a system, he declared, had not been achieved without the presence and help of an appreciable body of ground troops which, until the last year or two, had never fallen below 17,000 to 18,000 men.[2] Indeed, the Air Force had been the "lucky heirs" to, and not the creators of, a vastly improved political and military situation which had made economies possible. In the political sphere, the Cairo Conference had initiated a looser form of political control by which the Iraqis had been given a king of their choosing and a real share in the government of the country.[3] On the military side, the lessons of the 1920 rebellion had been severe and were not likely to be forgotten. Thus the Air Ministry had succeeded to a situation which bore no relation whatsoever to that which had existed two years previously. The Air Staff had staked their garrison on a gamble and, fortunately for them, the Iraqis had not yet called their bluff. In effect, the aeroplane simply provided a more rapid, efficient and less vulnerable form of communication than had hitherto been possible.

As far as Palestine was concerned, he confessed to "a feeling of undisguised astonishment" that anyone could seriously suggest that infantry were unsuited to deal with disorder in

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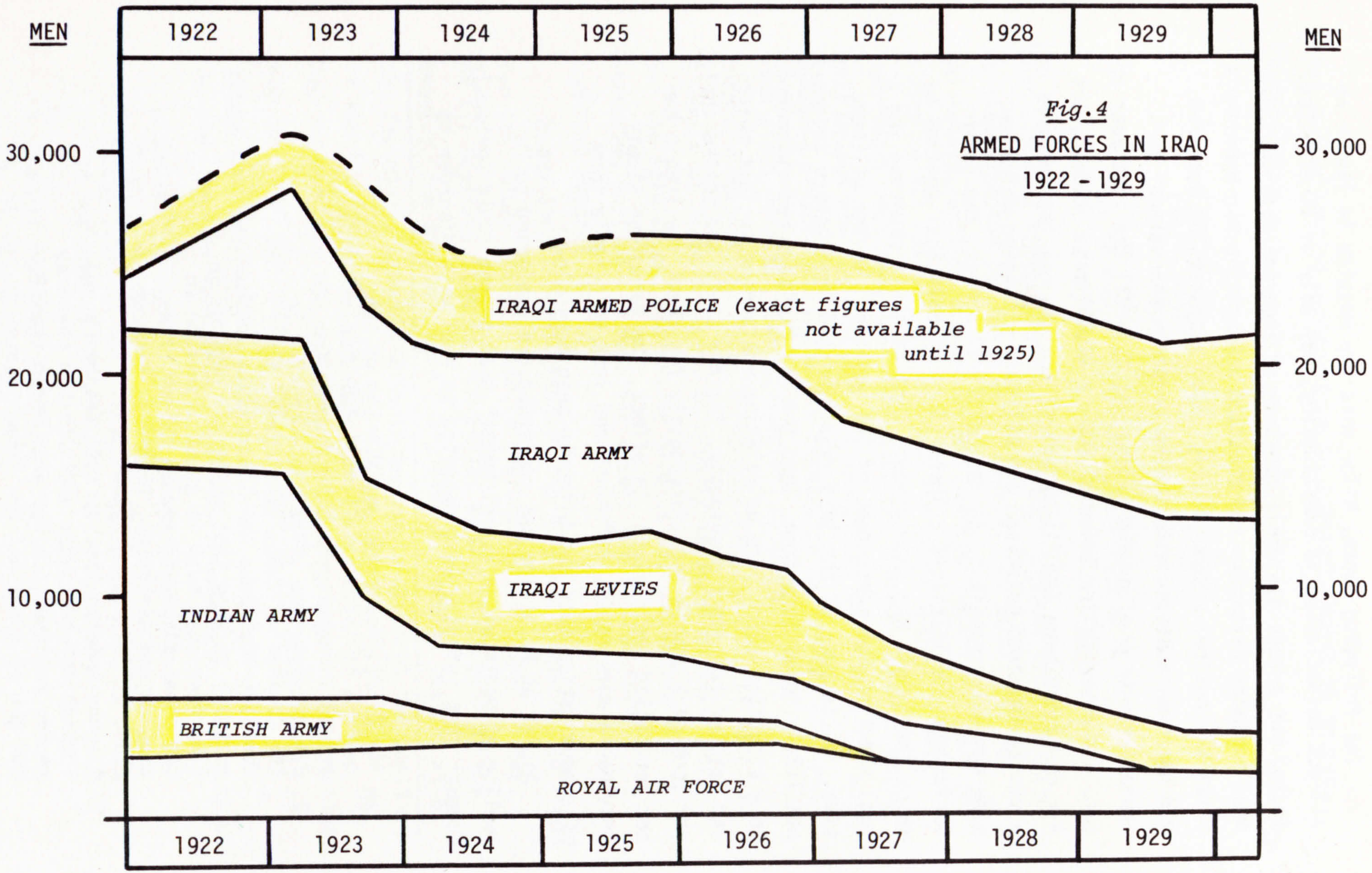
1. Air 8/121, Memoranda and Minutes of the Defence of India (Air Power) Sub-Committee, DI(AP) 2, Memo by CIGS, 4 June 1930.
2. See diagram over. This was submitted to the Defence of India (Air Power) Sub-Committee by Milne at a later date, and purports to show that under air control in Iraq there had been no great reduction in the total number of ground troops. For diagram see Air 8/121, DI(AP) 9, Memo by CIGS, 20 July 1931, Appendix II.
3. Klieman asserts that by 1921 Bolshevik and Turkish revolutionary activity had begun to recede and that, in the Arab World itself, the use of force and the demand for independence were on the wane. Aaron S. Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World*, pp.240-1.

Fig.4

ARMED FORCES IN IRAQ

1922 - 1929



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congested areas. In Aden, too, he still maintained that the garrison was inadequate for the security of the base. Here again, air control rested on the assumption that no serious trouble would arise. Certainly no such assumption could be made to justify the introduction of the system along the North West Frontier of India. As the General Staff had foreseen in 1921, argued Milne, the formation of a separate Air Ministry and Air Force had tended to drive the fighting services further apart, whereas the dictates of economy and strategy required the closest cooperation. He continued:

> The Air Staff have tended to become more and more absorbed with its own problems and by undertaking responsibilities for administration in a wide field, have relegated cooperation with the military and naval forces, which should be its essential function, to a secondary role.

Milne maintained that out of 33 regular squadrons in Great Britain, 5 only were allotted to Army cooperation, whilst out of a total of 57 squadrons throughout the Empire, only 15 were definitely earmarked for close service with the Army. The attitude of the Air Staff, which in some respects was antagonistic towards the Army, was encouraging the formation of a barrier between the two services where none should exist. So long as the human race was fundamentally pedestrian, it would continue to be influenced by happenings on the ground. It was to be noted that whilst the cooperation of aircraft with military forces was an important feature at every stage of Army training, the Air Force gave no instruction to its cadets or officers to qualify them to handle military forces. He continued:

> The doctrine which the Air Staff endeavour to inculcate that the operation of air forces can be intelligently directed only by an officer who holds a pilot's certificate is, in my opinion, both false and dangerous.[1]

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1. Air 8/121, Memoranda and Minutes of Defence of India (AP) Sub-Committee, DI(AP)2, 4 June 1930.

This bitter attack was renewed by the War Minister when the CID Sub-Committee on the Defence of India held its first meeting. If Trenchard's proposals were adopted, he warned, it would inevitably lead to "an interminable and probably unprofitable controversy".[1]

A response to these "sweeping denunciations" came in a memo in July. The Air Staff, it claimed, were fully entitled to regard the comparative tranquillity enjoyed in Iraq as "the fruits of air control", not as an inheritance from a former régime. Ground troops were certainly needed, but the primary role in defence was taken by aircraft and the economies realised were due to the employment of aircraft as the primary striking force.[2] In the case of India, it was undesirable that the present proposals should be exposed to the veto of a General Staff who were unable to examine the problems with the requisite detachment from departmental views. There was no "mystery" about the employment of aircraft, but one was still on the threshold of knowledge as to the capabilities of airpower and it was unlikely that a military commander would be found capable of fully understanding the intricacies of another service apart from his own. As regards the allocation of squadrons to Army cooperation, the paper considered it regrettable that a complaint of this nature should be suddenly produced before the Committee instead of being dealt with *via* the proper channels.[3]

That same month, however, two articles in the *Army Quarterly* strongly criticised certain features of air control. The first, an Editorial, argued that it was impossible to control a disorderly population from the air. The ultimate safety of any region within the Empire had to depend upon the presence of an adequate ground force.[4] The second, an article entitled "Mechanisation of the Desert" by Major Lionel Dimmock, RA, contended that air control in Iraq was limited due to the

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1. Air 8/121, DI(AP), 1st Meeting, 26 June 1930.
2. For chart showing reduction in the cost of the British garrison in Iraq see opposite. Figures quoted in Churchill, op.cit., p.465.
3. Air 8/121, DI(AP)4, 17 July 1930.
4. *Army Quarterly*, Vol.XX, No.2, July 1930, p.234.

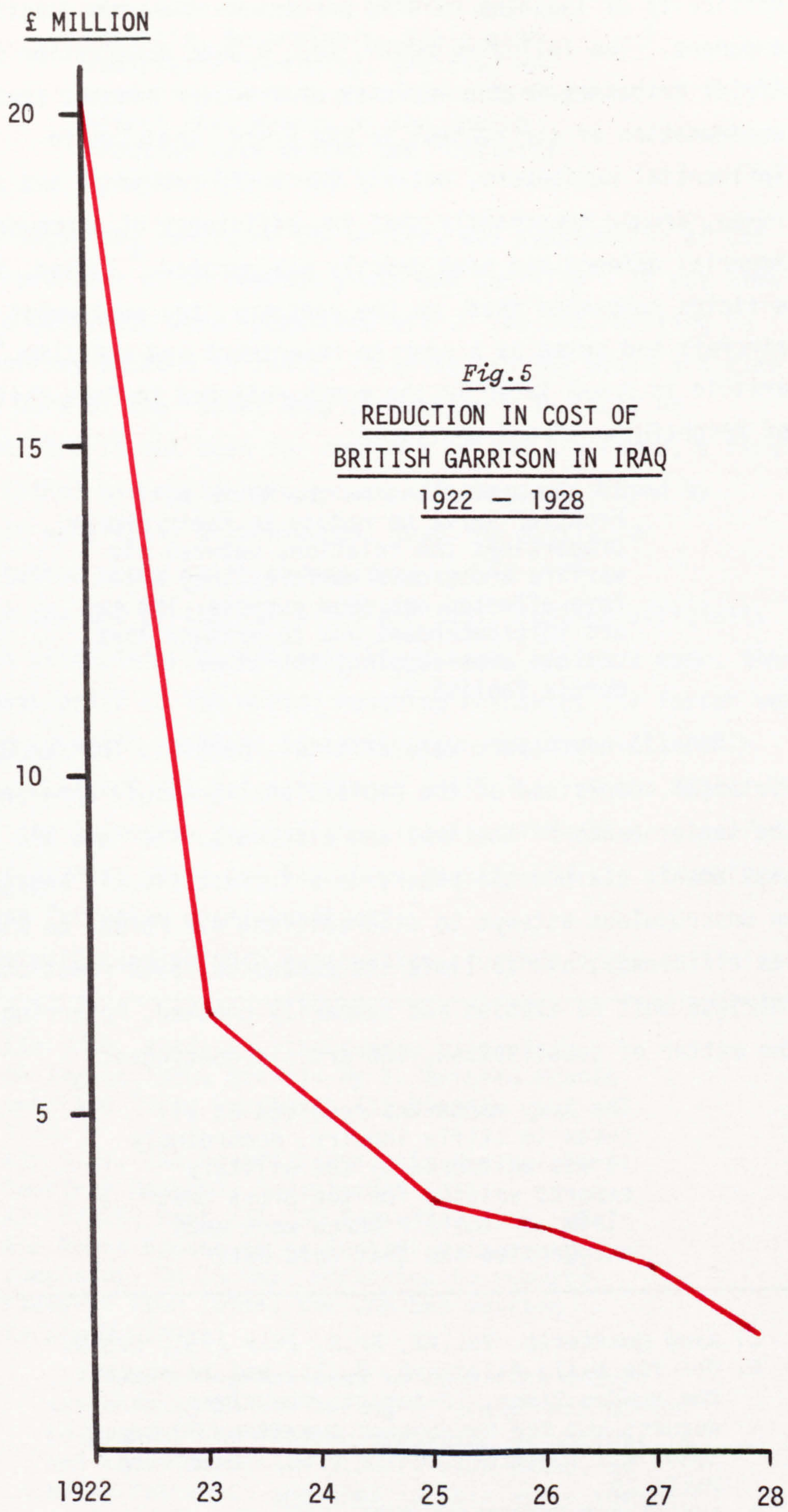

Fig.5

REDUCTION IN COST OF
BRITISH GARRISON IN IRAQ
1922 – 1928

difficulty of locating raiding parties in the wide desert expanses.[1] The following month, too, a deep penetration of Afridi tribesmen in the vicinity of Peshawar brought strong condemnation of air control in the press. Articles in influential newspapers, notably *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*, argued trenchantly that the efficiency of airpower in imperial defence had been grossly exaggerated.[2] Indeed, two articles suggested that, on the contrary, the employment of aircraft had acted as a spur to resentment and audacity.[3] An article in *Truth* later in the month referred to "the failure of frightfulness" and continued:

> If the operations on the North West Frontier serve to reduce to their proper proportions the relations between air warfare and ground warfare, they will have effected one good purpose. The two are interdependent and to pretend that one can ever supplant the other is merely foolish.[4]

Not all newspapers were critical, however. The *Sunday Pictorial* complained of the professional jealousy apparent in the senior ranks of the Army and elsewhere. The "bow and arrow gentlemen", claimed the paper, were surreptitiously engaged in an unscrupulous attempt to discredit the Air Force, to minimise its efficiency, and to limit its expansion. Such reactionary intrigue must be exposed and summarily checked. Referring to the matter of substitution, the article continued:

> The Army mandarins resolved at all costs to stifle inquiry. Accordingly it was whispered by the military experts writing for the press that claims of the Air Force were much exaggerated and that cold water

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1. *Army Quarterly*, Vol.XX, No.2, July 1930, p.359.
2. See *The Daily Telegraph*, 8, 11, and 16 August; *The Sunday Times*, 10 August; *The Times*, 11 August; and *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 August 1930. All contained in Air 9/62, commencing Folio 19.
3. Articles in *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 and 16 August 1930.
4. *Truth*, 27 August 1930. See Air 9/62, Folio 28.

> should be thrown on them as much as possible. Accordingly, again with remarkable unanimity, articles are appearing in many newspapers to the effect that events on the Indian frontier have proved the "definite failure of aircraft".[1]

Such antagonism, concluded the writer, was symptomatic of the "ever recurrent clash between youth and senility". It was time the old gentlemen were "pensioned off".[2] The CAS, writing to Sir Geoffrey Salmond in India, likewise saw the press articles as the work of the "usual Army propaganda". In fact, he claimed, had it not been for the work of the Air Force, a first class tribal war would have ensued. If the part played by aircraft were fully acknowledged, then the battle for substitution would be three-quarters won.[3]

At the end of the month the Air Staff replied officially to such criticism. The Cabinet should know, stated a memo, that four days prior to the Afridi reaching Peshawar, air forces were obliged to watch lashkars advancing down the Bara valley. In fact, air attack was not sanctioned until late on the night before the tribesmen reached the vicinity of Peshawar itself. Such an advance would not have been possible if air attack had not been "crippled by mishandling".[4]

Notwithstanding such explanation, further press criticism

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1. Air 9/62, Folio 23, the *Sunday Pictorial*, 24 August 1930, article by F. Britten Austin entitled "Give Our Youth Its Wings".
2. Ibid.
3. Air 9/27, CAS to AOC India, Air Marshal Sir Geoffrey Salmond, 5 September 1930.
4. Air 8/122, Part III, 30 September 1930. The Air Force appear to be justified in their complaint. On 13 May, referring to reports received from India, the CAS had written to his Minister:

   > .. these telegrams seem to show that delays are ensuing in the taking of prompt air action to prevent the further spreading of unrest, and that the action itself, when taken, is being fettered: and that in this way a very serious situation is being allowed to develop.

   Ibid., Part II, Item 7. Author's underlining.

was made of air control towards the end of the year. As far as the role of the Air Force in India was concerned, the strongest denunciation came in two articles in *The Daily Telegraph* written by journalist L.S. Ashmead-Bartlett. Basing his arguments on first hand experience, he maintained that all the real donkey work along the North West Frontier fell upon the Army, as it was bound to do in all operations carried out in mountainous country. Over such terrain aircraft were "almost innocuous" once the tribesmen had learnt a few elementary lessons in self defence. The writer attacked, too, the system of dual control, arguing that this had led to many muddles, some of which had enabled the Afridis to penetrate to the gates of Peshawar twice during the summer. Both cooperation and efficiency were impossible when there were two separate staffs taking independent instructions from the civil authorities for operations against a common enemy.[1] A few days later an article in *The Sunday Times* took up the same theme.[2]

Senior soldiers also expressed their views at this time. In private, Ironside strongly criticised air control in a letter to Liddell Hart. Referring to Iraq, he claimed that the system meant that those operating it never came into contact with the people they were controlling. The Empire had been built up by Frontier men; it could not be maintained by the remote action of air control.[3] In public, the Indian General Staff took a similar line. Lt.General Sir Cyril Deverell, the CGS, stated that an air force based in places like Bannu, Tank, Kohat and Peshawar could make no contribution towards the betterment of tribal conditions. People could not be civilised by flying over them or dropping bombs upon their villages. Ethical considerations aside, experience had shown that lashkars and hostile gangs had clearly learnt the lessons of dispersion, concealment and night movement in order to avoid losses from

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1. Air 9/62, Folios 32 and 33, *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 and 12 December 1930.
2. Ibid., Folio 37, Leader in *The Sunday Times*, 17 December 1930.
3. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/401, Ironside to Liddell Hart, 5 January 1931.

air action. The Air Force could never play a solo part. Only by "rewelding" the two services together would the maximum safety, efficiency and economy be achieved. The withdrawal of regular garrisons from Tochi, Razmak and Wana would mean that the vital road construction and the development of hospitals, schools and agriculture would be seriously affected.[1] In a later memo, Deverell claimed that air control in practice meant the complete abandonment of the only justifiable attitude that a civilised Power could adopt towards its own backward subjects.[2]

In the New Year the AOC India, undeterred by such opposition, published the reductions in ground forces contemplated in a proposed air control scheme for Waziristan,[3] maintaining that the savings made by such reductions would not only cover the initial capital outlay for the air scheme, but also the recurring costs of the increased air requirements. Aircraft, properly handled and with the assistance of regular forces, could effectively control tribal territory at a minimum cost in lives and money. In a sentence: the column was provocative, air control was preventive.[4]

A few weeks later the Air Staff's case was supported in principle by the findings of the Tribal Control and Defence Committee. Set up by the Indian Government in September 1930 to examine and review the policy of frontier defence, the Committee reported that during the disturbances of the previous year, the value of the air weapon and of airpower generally had been clearly demonstrated. Aircraft, it claimed, had acted

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1. Air 8/121, DI(AP)13, Memo by the General Staff, India, 30 October 1930.
2. Ibid., DI(AP)14, 20 January 1931.
3. These were 1 British infantry battalion, 5 Indian infantry battalions, 1 Indian cavalry regiment, 3 field batteries, 2 light or medium batteries, and one section of medium artillery. See Air 9/63, Folio 13, Policy for the Control of Waziristan, by AOC India, January 1931. For India as a whole, the Air Ministry proposed the release of 1 British battalion, 24 Indian battalions, 1 cavalry regiment and 12½ batteries. See Air 8/121, DI(AP)10, Memo by the Secretary of State for Air, 15 September 1931.
4. Air 9/63, Folio 13, Policy for the Control of Waziristan, by AOC India, January 1931.

as a deterrent against the occurence of trouble and had checked it spreading. Whilst it recommended no reduction in ground forces along the frontier itself, it felt that reductions could be made in those forces of the field army which were only mobilised and brought into action at the later stages of an operation.[1]

Despite these findings, a number of military witnesses called by the Committee had spoken out forcefully against air control, arguing that, quite apart from having no civilising influence, it made the Army's task more difficult by dispersing the enemy. Deserving of special mention are the comments made by Captain Blacker. He considered that the development of the technical means of cooperation between ground forces and aircraft had been much neglected. There was, as he put it, a "distinct hiatus" between aircraft and forward troops.[2]

In the CID Sub-Committee, however, the conflict between the two departments continued unabated until the beginning of 1932.[3] By this time more pressing problems, not least of which was the growing political unrest within India itself, cut short the Committee's deliberations. Towards the end of January the Chairman of the Committee, the Secretary of State for India, announced that conditions both at home and in India made further discussion of this "intricate and contentious question" inopportune.[4] His postponement of the controversy until conditions were more favourable meant that the issue was not seriously raised again within the period under review.

In India itself, it would appear that by 1935 the relations between the two services at command level had become

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1. Air 9/63, Folio 23, Report of the Tribal Control and Defence Committee, 26 March 1931.
2. Ibid., Folio 23, Minute 10. This aspect is considered further in Chapter 10 of this work.
3. See Air 8/121, DI(AP)9, Memo by Secretary of State for War on substitution generally, 20 July 1931, and ibid., DI(AP)10 and DI(AP)16, Memos by Secretary of State for Air, 15 September and 18 December 1931.
4. Ibid., Note by Secretary of State for India, 27 January 1932, accompanying DI(AP) Papers 11-16.

surprisingly harmonious. Writing to the C-in-C India, FM Sir Philip Chetwode, in June of that year, the AOC India, AM Sir Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt, showed a most conciliatory attitude. His letter deserves to be quoted at length:

> I am not here to compete with the Army on any ground whatever, but simply to cooperate on the best of terms under your orders. I have seen so much of the dangerous tendencies of inter-service jealousy and suspicion that I fully realise the necessity of subordinating so-called service interests to the requirements of national defence as a whole. For years at the Staff College and at the Air Ministry I did everything I could to eradicate the ridiculous but intense suspicion which exists in my service to the attitude and motives of the General Staff towards the RAF. I believe that one of the causes of anti-Air Force feeling out here is fear of substitution. Perhaps it would help to promote a better understanding if it were known that I am entirely opposed to the reduction of a single British soldier in India. [1]

In his reply, Chetwode likewise blamed some of the misunderstanding upon Trenchard's "ill-advised Cabinet paper on substitution". This, he claimed, had intensified the fears of many soldiers concerning the possibility of large-scale reductions in the Army.[2]

On the purely tactical front, too, attempts were made at this time to improve cooperation between forward troops and supporting aircraft. Wing Commander J.C. Slessor in particular carried out exercises with this in mind towards the end of 1936.[3] In the New Year, however, when further troubles broke out in Waziristan, there was renewed friction between the two services. By May the Army were heavily engaged and three brigades of the Field Army had been called in to assist the normal covering troops. Commenting upon these operations in a memo to the CGS,

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1. Bartholomew Papers, 2/1/13, Ludlow-Hewitt to Chetwode, 28 June 1935.
2. Ibid., 2/1/14, Chetwode to Ludlow-Hewitt, 30 June, 1935.
3. See this work, pp.292-4.

Slessor complained that the role of the air forces had been "cooperation in the narrowest sense". Such disturbances, he argued, could not be controlled by a combination of road making and a policy of "burn and scuttle" by army columns. Airpower, used properly with the normal garrison, could have localised the troubles and avoided a large and costly military operation.[1]

Despite this disagreement, however, when ACM Sir Cyril Newall was appointed CAS a few months later, he was clearly anxious to avoid such open friction. Although concerned about the status of the Air Force in India, he counselled caution when writing to his Minister:

> .. I suggest it would be wiser for you not to open this subject with the Secretary of State for War at present, particularly as it is undesirable for me to embark on a serious disagreement with the WO on a matter which they have very much at heart during the first month of my period of office.[2]

When writing to Deverell a few days later, therefore, Newall assured him that he had no intention of raising "the old and bitter controversy of substitution". He wished only to point out the inadequacy of the air force in strength, type and organisation to meet India's requirements, and the fact that airpower had not always been employed to the best advantage.[3]

Within the Air Force itself, however, feelings ran much higher. An Air Ministry directive that same month assured the AOC India that the unsatisfactory position of the RAF was fully appreciated. One of the solutions it advanced was the establishment of an RAF Army Cooperation Wing, paid and administered by the Air Force, but allocated for service with the Indian Defence Forces. The AOC was warned, however, not to give any indication that this change of policy was being contemplated.[4] Likewise some notes written at this time by a

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1. Air 9/11, Folio 60, Slessor to Vesey, July 1937.
2. Air 8/529, RAF India, North West Frontier Policy, Newall to Viscount Swinton, 16 September 1937.
3. Ibid., Newall to Deverell, 20 September 1937.
4. Ibid., Directive for AOC India, September 1937.

member of the Indian Air Staff revealed deep dissatisfaction both with policy and equipment. In recent years, the writer complained, the air arm had only been employed as "a weapon of the last resort". Furthermore, any hope of rapid employment was "crippled" by the slow machinery of governmental control. He continued:

> There is no doubt that the General Staff do not intend to use the air in any manner which might prejudice the continued use, unfettered, of the land forces in tribal territory. [1]

Air forces in India, he stated, would never be voluntarily used by the Army authorities except on a very small scale and with the minimum of information about their contribution afterwards. For a long time air activity would continue to be hampered by delays and objections on one score or another. In the meantime, the RAF could no longer press for substitution; there was far too much to be done at home to embark upon "an acrimonious controversy". On the matter of equipment, he complained that five out of eight squadrons were obsolete and that the Air Staff were not obtaining their fair share of defence funds. He noted:

> The Army leopard cannot suddenly be expected to change its spots, particularly if he is a hill leopard born and bred. All requests for money for defence are submitted to and conducted by a Principal Staff Officers' committee, virtually an Army Council to which the AOC is attached.. [2]

Annoyance over the allocation of defence funds was also voiced by Newall. At the same time as he was writing to the CGS, General Sir Ivor Vesey,[3] assuring him that the policy of

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1933/90, Some Notes on Frontier Policy as Affecting Imperial Defence, Air Staff, India, 4 January 1938.
2. Ibid.
3. Air 8/529, Letter from Peck to Newall, 16 October 1937, refers. Air Commodore R.H. Peck was then Senior Air Staff Officer, HQ India.

cooperation of recent years would be continued, the CAS was complaining bitterly to his Minister about the stranglehold which the Army had upon defence expenditure. He pointed out that out of £15 million recently acquired by the Army authorities for the rearmament of the forces, only some £3½ million had been earmarked for the Air Force. Furthermore, in arriving at that figure, the AOC's opinion had not been sought, despite the fact that the branches of Army HQ were officially obliged to consult the RAF on any matter which might concern it. On similar lines, Newall complained that the Air authorities had not been informed about a sum of £600,000 which had been provided by the Treasury for the re-equipment of four cavalry regiments and the formation of certain machine gun battalions. This allocation had been agreed between the WO, the India Office and the Treasury. It was clear that the time had come for a full examination into the country's defence responsibilities and commitments.[1]

The Government shared this view. In March the CID, acting on the authority of the Prime Minister, set up an inter-departmental committee between the WO, India Office and the Air Ministry "to consider the future organisation and composition of both the Army and RAF in India".[2] A note by Plans Branch, written three weeks earlier, had already outlined the Air Ministry's case. The Air Staff, conceded the Director, Group Captain Slessor, were no longer interested in substitution in India, nor in the methods of control along the Frontier, but they could no longer tolerate the continuation of a virtual "Army Air Arm" whereby eight valuable squadrons were inefficiently administered and equipped. Nothing could be put right, however, until the defence of India ceased to be regarded as a "closed preserve" and, instead, was dealt with as part of an overall scheme for Imperial Defence.[3]

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1. Air 8/529, Newall to Swinton, 29 January 1938. Such inter-departmental negotiations were described as "catch as catch can" by a member of the Indian Air Staff. See Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1933/90, Air Staff Note, 4 January 1938.
2. Cab 2/7, CID 313th Meeting, 17 March 1938.
3. Slessor Papers, VIIIA, Note by Plans Branch, 26 February 1938.

Newall adopted this line of argument when the discussions began. The air force in India, he claimed at one of the meetings, was "equipped with obsolete aircraft and trained in an obsolete framework". The Air Ministry could no longer continue to permit personnel who had been trained in the latest classes of aircraft and equipment to have to revert to obsolescent equipment and methods when serving in India. Vesey did his best to reassure the CAS that the C-in-C was seriously concerned over the position of the air force in India and, indeed, had formed a COS Committee to improve coordination. He was not prepared to comment, however, upon a new Air Staff suggestion that the air force in India should be run on an agency basis to avoid the lengthy delays caused by the existing procedure.[1]

The conclusions reached by the Inter-Departmental Committee under the chairmanship of the DMOI, Major General H.R. Pownall, went a long way towards recognising the Air Staff's major grievances. The Committee's report highlighted, for example, the disparity existing between the amounts allotted to the two fighting services. The 1938-9 budget was cited, wherein 93% had been allocated to the Army and less than 5% to the RAF. The report also concluded that in matters of Indian defence the Air Force had not been properly represented in the past.[2] Not surprisingly, these findings proved basically acceptable to the Air Staff. Newall was able to inform the CIGS, General Viscount Gort, that so far as the broad issues were concerned, the conclusions and recommendations were unanimous and showed that the interests of both services were parallel.[3]

Slessor notes that the Pownall Committee was an amicable affair and that the representatives from India were cooperative and understanding.[4] Such agreement was to be short-lived however. In June another short but sharp row broke out at the tactical

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1. Air 8/529, Note on Inter-Departmental Meeting held at the Air Ministry, 28 April 1938.
2. Ibid., Newall to Sir Kingsley Wood, Resumé of events, 2 June 1938. For full report see Annex 2 to COS Paper 737, Cab 53/39.
3. Air 8/529, Newall to Gort, 16 May 1938.
4. Slessor, op.cit., p.199.

level. Complaints made in person by Newall, including one alleging that the air forces were not adequately employed simply because local Army commanders wanted a share in the action, were roundly dismissed by the CGS. On making enquiries into these allegations, Vesey had been assured by his Deputy that Peck had been fully consulted during the recent operations and that the air force had been given as free a run as possible.[1] In his reply to the Air Ministry, therefore, Vesey claimed that, being distant from the realities of the situation, Newall had received a distorted view of the matter. Misuse of aircraft had doubtless occurred in the past, but every effort was being made to minimise the risk of this happening again. To suggest that Army commanders gave their troops a "run for their money" at the expense of the RAF was "absolute bunkum".[2] In his answer, Newall did not press this last point, but he continued to maintain that the Army was not using the air force according to agreed practice. In matters of frontier defence, he retorted, quoting none too convincingly from Molière, it was much more honourable to fail according to rule than to succeed by innovation.[3]

The same month also saw a deterioration in interservice cooperation at Staff level. Following a decision by the Chancellor to search for economies in Indian defence, the Air Staff, contrary to stated policy, resurrected the idea of substitution. Newall wrote to his Minister:

> I have not put this aspect of the subject before during the present discussion as I was most anxious not to introduce an element of certain discord into our proceedings.[4]

It was now clear, however, Newall contended, that the possibility of making economies by extending the use of airpower along the

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1. Air 8/529, Auchinleck to Vesey, 24 June 1938. Major General C.J.E. Auchinleck was Director of Staff Duties.
2. Ibid., Vesey to Newall, 6 July 1938.
3. Ibid., Newall to Vesey, 20 July 1938.
4. Ibid., Newall to Wood, 19 July 1938.

Frontier would be raised, and he thought it only right to suggest "an exploitation of this field".[1]

An opportunity to raise the question of substitution came later that year with the setting up of the Chatfield Commission, charged with the task of investigating the whole question of Indian defence.[2] The Air Staff were prepared to join battle. Air Commodore R.H. Peck, Senior Air Staff Officer, HQ India, writing to Slessor at this time, agreed that controversial issues could not and should not be avoided. "Sharp differences of view" were inevitable in attempting to ensure that airpower were used properly in the future.[3] Thus in giving evidence before the Commission in October, Slessor, then DDOI, maintained that "drastic economies" could be made in Indian defence by a more frequent use of aircraft on the Frontier. The Air Staff were convinced that substantial savings were possible by extending the use of the air method or, where this was not appropriate, by employing air and land forces on a properly coordinated plan.[4]

The recommendations of the Chatfield Commission, broadly similar though they were to those of the Pownall Committee, were not wholly acceptable to the Air Ministry's representative, AM C.L. Courtney. In a proviso to the report, he maintained that the Commission had taken too sanguine a view of Army-Air Force cooperation along the North West Frontier. Though this had improved in recent years, he held that the best use of airpower would not be achieved without some change in the "present machinery".[5] But such matters were not to be given the attention they surely deserved. Shortly after the recommendations had been accepted by the Cabinet, war broke out and the Government had more pressing matters to consider.

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1. Air 8/529, Newall to Wood, 19 July 1938.
2. Cab 24/278, CP 174(38), 1 July 1938.
3. Air 8/529, Peck to Slessor, Undated.
4. Ibid., Note by Air Staff enclosed in letter from Newall to Ludlow-Hewitt, 17 October 1938.
5. The report is contained in Cab 24/287, CP 133(39). For a comprehensive review of Indian Defence for this period see Gibbs, op.cit., Appendix II, p.830.

The competence of airpower in the control and defence of imperial possessions in the Middle and Far East is difficult to evaluate. Detailed research would be necessary before any valid judgment could be given. In broad terms it can certainly be said that in the areas where air control was employed there was a substantial saving in both money and manpower. On the other hand, the value of its contribution at the tactical level must be open to question, if only because it served to divorce rather than combine the tactics of Britain's air and land forces. As a result, a spirit of competition rather than cooperation was engendered and a wedge driven between the two fighting services.

Nor was this divergence of role confined to trouble spots along the distant frontiers of Empire. Throughout most of the 1930s political and military attention had been shifting with increasing urgency towards the worsening situation in Europe and here, as in the diverse territories of the Empire, the Air Ministry's claims to an independent role were threatening the very existence of the Army as a viable fighting force.

PART III

THE DIVERGING ROLES OF THE TWO SERVICES, 1926-1939

Chapter 8

The Dispute over War Objectives

May 1928 - December 1935

Important though the struggle for power was in the scattered and diverse possessions of the British Empire, the substitution of the Air Force for the Army was by no means confined to the sphere of imperial policing and defence. A paper by Trenchard in May 1928, produced eighteen months before the issue of his controversial "last will and testament", left his COS colleagues in no doubt as to the Air Staff's abiding faith in strategic bombing as a war-winning weapon in a European conflict. In outlining the war objectives of his Department, Trenchard made it abundantly clear that the Air Force's primary aim was "to paralyse from the very outset the enemy's production centres and munitions of war of every sort and to stop war communications and transportation". Instead of attacking the rifle and machine gun in the trenches, where the losses would be heavy and the gains would be small, air attack would be directed at the factory where these weapons were made. This was to be the new method of attaining the old objective: the defeat of the enemy nation. Whilst conceding that there would be some air requirement for ground forces when the enemy's army was being attacked, he maintained that to attack the enemy's armed forces was to strike at his strongest point. It was by attacking the sources from which these armed forces were maintained that the greatest effect both materially and morally could be obtained. No longer could the horrors and suffering of war be confined to the battlefield. Trenchard, clearly convinced that an enemy would adopt the same strategy, concluded:

> I would therefore urge most strongly that we accept this fact and face it. That we do not bury our heads in the sand like ostriches, but that we train our officers and men and organise our services so that we may be prepared to meet and to counter these inevitable air attacks. [1]

The CIGS, General Sir George Milne, [2] lost no time in challenging this paper. Such a policy, he warned, amounted to

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1. Cab 53/14, COS Paper 147, 2 May 1928.
2. Milne was appointed CIGS 19 February 1926.

the indiscriminate bombing and killing of unarmed civilians. It was ridiculous to contend that the dropping of bombs had reached such a state of accuracy as to ensure that bombs would hit only the so-called "military targets". Furthermore, he could not agree that in any future war the opposing forces would continue to attack each other's economic and vital centres whilst purely military objectives were "relegated to a secondary category of importance". He could not see why, in the end, the issue in the air would not be determined by the superiority of one force over another, as was the case in ground fighting. In addition, like any innovation on the battlefield, it was reasonable to argue that as the air menace grew, measures would be developed by which it could be combatted.

Milne pointed out, too, that in the matter of long-range bombing, Britain was at a distinct geographical disadvantage. London, the country's administrative and commercial centre, was highly vulnerable, whereas Paris lay 170 miles from the English coast and Berlin a great deal further. With this in mind, he argued that, so far as the employment of our air forces was concerned, it was clearly to our advantage to keep within the accepted codes of conduct of war. Instead, we were publishing to the world at large that we intended to employ such methods from the outset of hostilities.

Turning to the effectiveness of strategic bombing, the CIGS maintained that the claims made by the CAS were open to question, particularly in the respect of war with Russia, our most likely adversary at that time. He cautioned:

> It is necessary .. to consider whether our probable resources in aircraft alone could bring about decisive results or even achieve the object to attain which, in the opinion of the CAS, they should be employed.[1]

He reminded his colleagues that there was no precedent to show that any enemy could be paralysed by the policy of long-range

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1. Cab 53/16, COS Paper 155, 16 May 1928.
   The First Sea Lord held a similar view.
   See Cab 53/16, COS Paper 156, 21 May 1928.

bombing.[1] He could think of no occasion in the last war when military concentrations had been brought to a standstill by air action alone, or when railways on either side had been materially affected by air bombardment. Dunkirk, despite systematic bombing throughout the war, had continued to fulfil its function, whilst our own air efforts against enemy submarine bases in Belgium had had no lasting effect on the German underwater campaign. Nor had the air raids on London, although unpleasant, produced any deterrent effect, indeed, they had only served to stiffen the nation's will to fight. Improvements there had been in aircraft since that time, but counter air action had also reached an equally increased standard of efficiency. In urging the COS Sub-Committee to accept what practically amounted to an independent form of strategy by the RAF, the CAS had failed to put the problems involved into their proper perspective. The memo concluded:

> In war, concentration of effort alone can bring about success, and my main anxiety after studying the Air Staff memo is lest the acceptance of views advanced may lead us into exactly the opposite direction.[2]

At a meeting of the COS at the end of May, Milne took the matter further, complaining that the policy outlined by the CAS appeared to suggest a war objective which was completely divorced from the efforts of the other fighting services. So long as there was an element in the Air Force which had been brought up in "the atmosphere of the Army", he had no great fears, but it was unwise to spell out any doctrine which at some future date, when there was no longer an Army element within the Air Force, might lead to a wide divergence of views between the

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1. Hankey was also of this opinion. Sent a copy of the paper before it was circulated, he wrote to Trenchard, "I cannot but feel the gravest doubt as to whether you do not exaggerate the power of the Air Force." Hankey felt that it was only by a combination of all three fighting services that a really determined enemy could be overthrown. See Cab 21/314, letter dated 28 April 1928.
2. Cab 53/16, COS Paper 155, 16 May 1928.

two staffs. Faced with similar opposition from the First Sea Lord, Trenchard denied any intention of pursuing an independent war aim for his Department, and agreed to draw up a formula in keeping with the wishes of his colleagues.[1] This he did, and a few days later the COS Sub-Committee agreed to a format which placed greater emphasis upon air strategy "in concert with the Navy and Army".[2]

In fact, such a formula served only to paper over the cracks. Towards the end of the year a short, sharp exchange of letters between Trenchard and Milne revealed only too clearly the deep feelings of mistrust which lurked just below the surface. Following a visit to the Army's Staff College at Camberley, Trenchard wrote to Milne to complain that the Air Force officer on the directing staff was giving no instruction in the more advanced principles of air operations. He considered that the limitation in the type of instruction given was "imposed at the express request of the WO, since they objected to teaching the students what I call 'the Air Force faith' and preferred to confine instruction to the details of army cooperation pure and simple".[3] Milne's reply was to the point:

> So far as we are concerned there is not now, nor as far as we can trace has there ever been, any restrictions as regards the scope of the instruction to be given by this officer.

If such a restriction had been in force at any time, the CIGS concluded, then it had been imposed by the Air Ministry and not by the WO.[4]

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1. Cab 53/2, COS 70th Meeting, 30 May 1928.
2. Cab 53/17, COS Paper 162, 11 June 1928.
3. Air 5/280, 45a, Trenchard to Milne, 10 December 1928.
4. Ibid., 46a, Milne to Trenchard, 14 December 1928. In this connection it is noteworthy that Slessor later complained that all the time he was lecturing at Camberley (1931-34) the Commandant, Major General Dill, would not permit him to give the students the RAF case about air control on the North West Frontier of India. See Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1937/99, lunch with Group Captain Slessor, 25 November 1937.

The following year, the collapse of Wall Street plunged the world into deep economic depression. This, together with the optimism engendered by the Locarno Treaties and the wishful thinking which attended the Kellogg-Briand Pact and the Stresemann period, turned the attention of the Western World towards hopes of international disarmament. There was, as Lt.General Sir John Burnett-Stuart pointed out, a lack of public interest in the state of the fighting services and no interest in defence save as an obstacle to complete disarmament.[1] Thus despite constant warnings by the COS as to the country's state of unpreparedness, the programme of air expansion initiated in 1923 ground gradually to a halt, slowed down by the Government both as a measure of economy and as a gesture towards disarmament. In the years 1932 and 1933 not a single squadron was added to the strength of the RAF, which remained ten squadrons below the target of 52 set in the early 1920s.[2] "The result of this," Lord Swinton later recalled, "was not merely stagnation but retrogression."[3]

The Army fared no better. Its attempts at mechanisation had been less than half-hearted despite the promises held out by the CIGS in 1927. Like the proverbial month of March, the Milne administration had come in like a lion and appeared all set to go out like a lamb. As early as October 1929, according to Sir Samuel Hoare, Milne had become an old man, mentally and physically. Major General Sir Edmund Ironside wrote the following June:

> We the Generals are beginning to go down
> the drain in the opinion of the public.
> We are old and crusty and don't reform.
> The new Air Marshals are now prepared to
> do anything and assume any responsibility.
> It is in my mind wrong to let things lie

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/1932/12, Burnett-Stuart to Liddell Hart, 14 October 1932. Burnett-Stuart was then GOC British Troops in Egypt.
2. Denis Richards, *The Royal Air Force 1939-45*, Vol.I, p.8.
3. Lord Swinton, op.cit., p.104.
4. Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1929/18, talk with Liddell Hart, 31 October 1929.

> and to pretend that there is now agreement between the Services. [1]

Liddell Hart agreed. The Army, he declared, remained that "rusty machine that got stuck in the trenches". The public naturally regarded it with distrust.[2]

As the purse strings tightened further on service expenditure, the relations between the services became more embittered. Addressing the Imperial Defence College on the matter of service cooperation in December 1930, the CAS, ACM Sir John Salmond, referred to the different views held by the new arm and the "older order". He warned against the danger of "hardening our minds and slogging at each other".[3] But Salmond and Milne were never on good terms; his advice went unheeded. The following May Ironside informed Liddell Hart that "the struggle between the Air Force and the Army continues heatedly".[4]

The friction generating the most heat at this time was that concerning the efficacy of strategic bombing. Here, the claims of the Air Staff did not go unchallenged. Commenting upon the Air Exercises held in the years 1929 to 1931, one military observer maintained that the "all bomber theory" had been discredited. He called for more fighters and for the development of special low flying aircraft for tactical use. The public, he argued, had been persuaded by the Air Council that if war came London would soon be "dust and ashes". In fact, the conception of aerial defencelessness had no support from war experience or from peace time exercises. No less critical was an RAF officer. Writing in the *RUSI Journal*, he contended that, because the offensive was so attractive as a general principle, the interception of raiding aircraft was depicted

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/401, Ironside to Liddell Hart, 7 June 1930. Ironside was Commander, Meerut District, India, 1928-31.
2. Ibid., 1/132/10, Liddell Hart to Burnett-Stuart, 7 October 1932. In 1931 the regular Expeditionary Force comprised five infantry divisions, one of which was incomplete, and a cavalry division. See Peter Dennis, op.cit., p.26.
3. Air 9/1, Folio 9, December 1930.
4. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/401, 22 May 1931.

as a kind of "high speed blindman's bluff", despite the fact that the defensive role of aircraft had not yet been shown to be undesirable or impracticable. Furthermore, in the case of England, the policy of countering air bombardment by air bombardment might involve the risk of delivering blows in a comparative void and receiving them in a vital spot. Such was hardly a profitable undertaking.[1] But the Air Staff found staunch support in the columns of *The Aeroplane*. The idea of a defensive aircraft, declared the Editor, was "merely silly". The only sort of defence which was any good was one which struck hard and kept on striking hard until the enemy had had enough. The bomber was the weapon which "wins wars and keeps them won".[2]

In May 1932 Colonel Sir Frederick Pile entered the lists, roundly condemning such a policy. The Air Ministry, he complained, was trying to preserve bombing despite the fact that all stood to gain from a ban on bombers.[3] A few months later, however, the doctrine of strategic bombing received influential support from the publication of Liddell Hart's *The British Way in Warfare*, a work which placed emphasis upon the indirect approach in the strategic sphere and which contained the controversial seeds of limited liability. Lt.General Sir John Burnett-Stuart, whilst supporting such a policy, emphasised the need for a unified command structure. He wrote later that year:

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1. Articles on Air Exercises by Major Oliver Stewart, *Army Quarterly*, Vol.XVII, No.2, January 1929, p.262; Vol.XXI, No.1, October 1930, p.87; and Vol.XXIII, No.1, October 1931, p.109. Later, however, as Air Correspondent of *The Morning Post*, Stewart emphasised the difficulty of finding enemy aircraft from the air. See his work, *The Strategy and Tactics of Air Fighting*.

   Squadron Leader J.O. Andrews, "The strategic role of Air Forces", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXVI, 1931, p.740.
2. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XL, 24 June 1931, p.1178.
3. Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1932/15, talk with Pile, 6 May 1932. Pile was then Assistant Director of Mechanisation at the WO.

> The RAF has always overcalled its hand and is still overcalling it.. The Army does not want to eat up the Air Force - it wants to combine with them, and share with them its responsibilities. That is the only solution - one staff and one selected list for the higher commands. Then the pendulum would have a chance of swinging true and the adjustments between the air and ground would follow naturally. To use the RAF as a rod to beat the Army with .. does the Air no good and the Army much harm.[1]

With the invasion of Manchuria by Japan, the emergence of militant Nazism in Germany, and the withdrawal of both these countries from the League of Nations, attempts at disarmament were reluctantly abandoned. Demand grew for an increase in air strength. Lt.Colonel Pownall noted in his diary:

> It certainly seems that educated opinion is beginning to realise that we have gone too far in setting an example in reduction of armaments and must now retrace the path.[2]

When the British Government did begin its first painful review of its defence requirements in 1934, it soon became clear that the doctrine of strategic bombing had survived the lean years of collective security in the mid 1920s and the attempts at disarmament in the early 1930s. In the words of one observer, the Air Force had emerged as "the spearhead of every attack";[3] in the words of another, the Prime Minister himself, the bomber would "always get through".[4] Indeed, the publicity afforded airpower during the long, abortive attempts at international

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/132/7, Burnett-Stuart to Liddell Hart, 14 September 1932.
2. Brian Bond (Ed), *Chief of Staff: The Diaries of Lt.General Sir Henry Pownall*, Vol.I, 30 November 1933, p.26. The Ten Year Rule had been cancelled earlier that month. See Cab 23/77, Cabinet 62nd Meeting, Conc.5, 15 November 1933.
3. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XLIII, 20 July 1932, p.131.
4. *Hansard*, (HC5s), Vol.270, Col.632, 10 November 1932. Spoken just prior to presenting Britain's disarmament plan to the Geneva Conference on the reduction and limitation of armaments.

disarmament had served only to highlight the potential danger of the bomber as a war weapon. Grey wrote:

> The Disarmament Conference has at any rate done one good thing - it has given the Air Force the finest advertisement it has ever had. If nothing had been said at Geneva about abolishing bombing and prohibiting air attack, and all that other nonsense, the ordinary Englishman would never have awakened to the fact that the Air Force is in danger.[1]

Pownall noted this growing support for airpower and sounded a warning note. The public cry, he wrote, was all for the Air Force. It was time that there was propaganda to the effect that the air arm can only to a small degree be substituted for the older services. It was "a new and expensive complication superimposed on the older methods of attack and defence".[2] Gort's biographer makes the same point. At this period, he later wrote, the Army felt "neglected and aggrieved".[3] Later in the year, however, the publication of Groves' *Behind the Smoke Screen* added considerable weight to the case made out by the advocates of strategic bombing, predicting as it did that the Expeditionary Force would be "almost certainly" paralysed even before it reached the battlefield.[4] The military mind, he held, had all along failed to understand what airpower was all about.

It was intuitive faith such as this in the bomber's potential which accounted for much of the Army's opposition to the Air Ministry at this period. Pownall noted that Colonel T. Hutton and Lt.General W.H. Bartholomew were strongly anti-Air Force and that they proposed "to obstruct the Air Ministry

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1. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XLV, 18 October 1933, p.660. It was in response to this "danger" that Mr.Baldwin was later to assure the House of Commons that in air strength and airpower, "this country shall no longer be in a position inferior to any country in striking distance of our shores". *Hansard*, (HC5s), Vol.286, Col.2078, 8 March 1934. See also Air 9/8, Folio 53.
2. *Pownall Diaries*, op.cit., 13 March 1934, p.38.
3. J.R.Colville, *Man of Valour*, p.68.
4. Brigadier General P.R.C.Groves, *Behind the Smoke Screen*, p.219.

right or wrong in every possible way". It was sufficient, wrote Pownall, for the Air Ministry to say that black was black for the WO to protest that it was white. Not, he added, that the Air Ministry refrained from edging in various ways to improve their own position.[1] By this time, Liddell Hart noted, the General Staff had replaced the Admiralty as the most bitter opponent of the Air Force.[2]

So negative an attitude on the part of the WO can in no way be condoned, but a weighty measure of opposition is at least understandable. Air Staff notes of this period, whilst conceding that aircraft had some part to play in a purely defensive role, regarded the counter offensive as "the backbone of air defence".[3] In theory, the targets of such an offensive were to be of purely military importance, but, in practice, such a policy amounted to an attack on the civilian population in an attempt to force a surrender. This was a concept which, as Liddell Hart was later to point out, had been inherent in RAF doctrine almost from the beginning.[4] As one contemporary writer put it:

> The only defence is in offence, which means you have got to kill more women and children quicker (*sic*) than the enemy if you want to save yourselves.[5]

Thus when the first meeting of the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee got under way in November 1933, the divergent strategies of the two services re-emerged. The CAS, ACM Sir Edward Ellington,[6] anxiously maintained that the first requirement to be met was to bring the Home Defence Air Force up to its proper scale of 52 squadrons.[7] Indeed, so preoccupied was he with air defence, that at a subsequent meeting he had to be

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1. *Pownall Diaries*, op.cit., 28 September 1933, p.21. Bartholomew was then DMOI, and Hutton was working in the Department of the CIGS.
2. Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1933/40, Notes on Milne's Regime as CIGS, Undated.
3. Air 9/8, Folio 47a, October 1933.
4. Letter to *RUSI Journal* dated 9 April 1962. See Vol.CVII, p.156.
5. Eugene M.Emme, *The Impact of Air Power*, p.52.
6. Appointed 22 May 1933.
7. Cab 16/109, DRC 1st Meeting, 14 November 1933.

pointedly reminded of the 19 squadrons required by the Field Force if it were despatched to the Continent. Pownall, referring to this occasion in his diary, noted:

> Air Staff had taken no account of this at all, had not even agreed to the number of Army Cooperation squadrons required.[1]

On the other hand, for the CIGS, General Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd, deeply concerned as he was with the Army's unpreparedness, the needs of Home Defence took third place to the protection of imperial outposts in the Far East and the provision of a force for the Continent.[2] In justifying this order of priority, the CIGS contended that the Air Force made too much of the German air menace. Whilst agreeing that Germany could, if she so desired, concentrate all her air resources in an attack on Britain, he argued that it was impossible to expect absolute safety in all conditions.[3] Even Liddell Hart, who had played so prominent a part in broadcasting the war potential of the bomber, now alleged that fears concerning aviation were being inflated by a quantity of "hot air". Writing in *The New York Times*, he maintained:

> So far as the civilian masses are concerned, their present danger is undoubtedly being exaggerated .. the air forces of Europe today are not large enough to carry out the universal devastation that is popularly imagined.[4]

It is to be noted, however, that Ellington was not opposed in principle to sending a Field Force to the Continent. As a

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1. *Pownall Diaries*, op.cit., 23 January 1934, p.34. See also letter from Hankey to Ellington wherein Hankey refers to this omission, Cab 21/434, 28 February 1934.
2. Cab 16/109, DRC 3rd Meeting, 4 December 1933.
3. Ibid., 7th Meeting, 25 January 1934.
4. Liddell Hart Papers, 10/1934/7a, 28 January 1934. Brian Bond notes that by the late 1930s Liddell Hart had given up his "brief flirtation" with the theory of strategic bombing. See *Liddell Hart: A Study of his Military Thought*, p.109.

former gunner, he laid stress upon the moral effect of such action. Indeed, according to Group Captain R.H. Peck, he took a soldier's attitude towards such matters rather than "the modern air view".[1] This was certainly the case at the beginning of March when Hankey, fearing opposition to a continental commitment from some quarters, informed Sir Robert Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, that he could depend upon Ellington's support.[2] By this time, too, the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee, which included the COS, had come down heavily in favour of a well-equipped Expeditionary Force for the Continent.[3] Then in May the COS reported to the Sub-Committee on Defence Policy and Requirements:

> So long as we hold the Low Countries not only do we gain warning of attack but our own counter offensives start nearer their objectives than do the German attacks on England, in fact, we should have superiority of position.

To limit our assistance to sea and air forces, they claimed, would be interpreted by our allies as equivalent to abandoning them to their fate.[4]

This is not to suggest, however, that Ellington's support was unqualified. Indeed, this was far from the case. The report of the Defence Policy and Requirements Sub-Committee itself refers to a serious and unresolved discrepancy between the two Staffs over the character of German rearmament and Germany's strategical intentions.[5] This disagreement had been heatedly aired at a meeting of the COS at the beginning of May. On that occasion Montgomery-Massingberd had claimed that according to the Military Attaché in Berlin, the German Air Force would be used in close cooperation with their land forces and that "there would be no bombing outside the zone of the armies .. until success on land had been assured". If such were the case,

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1935/113, Talk with Peck (then DDOI), 12 December 1935.
2. Cab 21/434, Hankey to Vansittart, 8 March 1934.
3. Cab 16/109, DRC 14, para.25, 28 February 1934.
4. Cab 16/123, DPR(DR) 5, 8 May 1934.
5. Ibid.

he had argued, it followed that, as in 1914, the role of the Expeditionary Force would be to attack the German flank in order to prevent an enemy occupation of bases in the Low Countries. In this connection air action by itself could not end a war.[1]

For his part, Ellington had questioned the validity of the General Staff's appreciation. His information, on the contrary, tended to show that, because the French defences were so powerful, the Germans were determined to put all their supplementary efforts into their air forces.[2] In any case, he had reminded his colleagues, the Channel ports might be rendered untenable, thus preventing the despatch of the Expeditionary Force. It might not be possible to use Calais, Dunkirk, Antwerp and Boulogne and, with the increasing range of aircraft, Le Havre might not be usable in ten years' time. He had considered that a heavy attack once a day on these ports would be sufficient. Furthermore, "fairly accurate bombing" was also possible at night by means of flares. Such predictions brought a counter charge of exaggeration. The whole air threat, stated the CIGS, was problematical and had to be put into perspective. There were those, he conceded, who maintained that the next war would begin with bombing by day and night and that this scale of attack would continue indefinitely. Personally he could not accept that any arm of the services could sustain such a pace.[3]

Meanwhile in the Ministerial Committee on Disarmament, charged with the task of reviewing the findings of the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee, the Secretary of State for War, Lord Hailsham, was fighting a long rearguard action against Chamberlain and Sir John Simon in what was to prove a vain

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1. Cab 53/4, COS 125th Meeting, 4 May 1934.
2. In a memo two months later, Ellington argued that owing to the exposed position of London it was reasonable to assume that initially Germany would send two-thirds of her total bomber force against this country. Cab 53/24, COS Paper 344, 11 July 1934.
3. Cab 53/4, COS 125th Meeting, 4 May 1934.

attempt to retain a continental commitment based on a more balanced concept of defence spending. Was the Government prepared to say, he asked, that indiscriminate bombing was acceptable and that, no matter what happened to the Low Countries, no Expeditionary Force would be employed in their defence?[1] The Army, he pointed out, had been short of £30 million when Milne had retired as CIGS the previous year, yet the vote proposed for the expansion of the Army over the next five years had been reduced from £40 to £19 million. If it were considered that Germany would not be in a position to wage war for five years, then why were the Air Force requirements to be met and, indeed, increased? The Army, in fact, was necessary in order that Belgium should be available as an air base for Britain and not as an air base for Germany.[2] The War Minister stressed, too, the size of the German army - then estimated at 21 divisions - and the serious decline in the strength of the British ground forces. Whilst he did not dispute the need for a strong Air Force, he was not convinced, he told the Committee, that the provision of a large air force would be an effective deterrent against Germany.[3]

Such arguments proved of no avail against a Foreign Office and a Treasury who were determined, on the contrary, to regard a strong air force as the only workable deterrent. The Army, argued Chamberlain, was not a deterrent. It only came into action if the deterrent failed and, as such, it had to be regarded as "the second line of defence". The defence of the Low Countries was important, but as it was impossible to make provision for both the Army and the Air Force over the short term, then it was only right that the Air Force, the chief deterrent, should be dealt with first.[4] As an Editorial in *The Aeroplane* put it:

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1. Cab 16/110, Cabinet Committee on Disarmament, 10 May 1934. Chamberlain was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Simon the Foreign Secretary.
2. Ibid., 26 June 1934.
3. Ibid., 12 July 1934.
4. Ibid. The following month the Government approved the first of 13 air expansion programmes. See Montgomery Hyde, op.cit., p.318.

> The function of the Army is to hold ground which the enemy has abandoned because of air action.[1]

Amid such a climate it is hardly surprising that a *Times* article in May of that year, pressing for a combined staff and proposing that the Army should be given its own air service on the lines of the Fleet Air Arm, should fall on stony ground in Whitehall.[2] The ground in Kingsway proved even less fertile. Despite assurance to the contrary by the leader writer, the Air Staff clearly saw the article as a subtle means of reopening the whole question of the independence of the Air Ministry.

That such fears were still harboured by the Air Force became evident towards the end of that year. A suggestion by the CIGS that the Staff Colleges of the three services should be amalgamated to assist inter-service cooperation[3] served to rekindle the embers of animosity and mistrust which had continued to smoulder since the findings of the Colwyn Committee early in 1926. The DCAS, AM Sir Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt, for example, advised against having anything to do with a one-sided argument which would tend to confirm the view, expressed so often in the writings of both soldiers and sailors, that the Air Force, like the Army, had only to deal with the enemy on land, and that the two services could therefore be unified in one form or another. He admitted, however, that it was never desirable nor practicable to "refuse to play when the CIGS suggests improving the machinery of cooperation". For his part, he suggested a temporary interchange of staff officers, and then added, revealingly:

> I do not believe that this does very much good, but it is a way of creating the impression that the services are doing their utmost to become mutually acquainted.[4]

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1. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XLVII, 4 July 1934, p.15.
2. Article entitled "A Combined Staff", 21 May 1934. See also Air 9/5, Folio 32.
3. Air 2/717, CAS to DO, 10 October 1934, refers.
4. Ibid., Ludlow-Hewitt to CAS, 19 October 1934.

Equally partisan motives for supporting officer exchange had been put forward only two days earlier. A letter from the DO to the CAS alluding to the difficulties of placing Army officers in suitable posts, had pointed out that the Inland Area was ruled out for fear that the WO, presuming that their staff officers were essential in the Command which controlled the Army Cooperation Squadrons, might press for a separate air arm.[1] On the same day, a supplementary Air Staff note had stated that such exchanges were considered to be the best means of preventing the Army from "drifting into an attitude of hostility towards the RAF and endeavouring to create a new Fleet Air Arm problem".[2]

Commenting upon the Army's proposal a few days later, the DDOI, Group Captain R.H. Peck, warned that the suggestion was clearly intended to bring the Air Force under the Army as "a younger brother". It was simply another method of achieving the old aim. In effect, such a suggestion was prejudicial to the full development of airpower not only for imperial defence, but also as a new means of bringing pressure to bear upon the enemy. Good relations with the Army were to be encouraged in practical ways, but such a proposal was a retrograde step. He continued:

> I have great fear that the CNS will find himself unable to fall in with the CIGS proposals and that, when he has stepped out, the CIGS will then press for at any rate an Army and Air combination which, of course, would be housed at Camberley. I think this would be a proposal dangerous in the extreme.[3]

Many senior Army officers, he advised, still felt strongly that there was no such thing as an air strategy and no means by which air action could overcome the enemy's will to wage war. On this point, therefore, there was still "a fundamental difference of doctrine" between the two services. He thus felt that it would assist a great deal if the General Staff were to

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1. Air 2/717, DO to CAS, 17 October 1934.
2. Ibid., Notes on the interchange of Staff Officers, 17 October 1934.
3. Ibid., DDOI to DCAS, 19 and 25 October 1934.

be given a greater understanding than they had at present of the problems of air defence.[1]

A note by the Commandant of the RAF Staff College, AVM W.R. Freeman, was no less forthright. He considered that the atmosphere of a combined college might "stifle progressive thought and new ideas". It was of the utmost importance to the RAF that its junior officers should not be restricted by the conservatism of the older services. The tenets of the Army and Navy were not fully applicable to a service which worked in a new element and under new conditions. What was required was not an amalgamation of the services, but an improvement in their relationship and cooperation.[2] The following month the AMP, AVM F.W. Bowhill, came out strongly against even an exchange of staff officers. The Air Staff had quite enough to do, he argued, without being hampered by having an officer of another service in place of a "proper RAF officer".[3] Ten days later Air Commodore C.L. Courtney, the DSD, warned that if the Navy did not participate in a combined staff college, the Air Force would be in a decided minority and was likely to be "swamped".[4] Likewise the DCAS, AVM Sir Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt, when informing Ellington of this strong opposition, advised that:

> the strong military atmosphere of Aldershot, Farnborough and Camberley would tend to sap the service spirit of the RAF Staff College and possibly bias its outlook.[5]

At the root of this ill feeling between the two services

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1. Air 2/717, DDOI to DCAS, 19 and 25 October 1934.
2. Ibid., Note by AVM W.R. Freeman, 29 October 1934.
3. Ibid., AMP to DCAS, 9 November 1934.
4. Ibid., DSD to DCAS, 19 November 1934.
5. Ibid., DCAS to CAS, 30 November 1934. It is ironic that the idea of a combined staff college appears to have been initiated on this occasion by Wing Commander A.W.H. James, the MP for the Wellingborough Division of Northants, in a debate in the House of Commons, 15 March 1934, *Hansard*, (HC5s), Vol.287, Col.664. See *Army Quarterly*, Editorial, Vol.XXVIII, 2 July 1934, pp.195-6.

lay anxieties in both departments as to the other's war objectives. Just as the WO feared that the Air Ministry were planning an independent war policy based on wholesale strategic bombing, so, in their turn, the Air Ministry feared that the WO was working towards an open-ended continental commitment on a 1914-18 scale. Under the positive pressures of German rearmament the fundamental differences in strategy which had given rise to the paper polemics of the 1920s now began to reassert themselves in more realistic terms.

The COS had two problems to handle, noted Pownall in September 1934. One was the redirection of the nation's defence plans; the other was the greater coordination of staff training and liaison between the services, especially between the Army and the RAF.[1] The following month an exchange of letters between Wing Commander Slessor and AVM Freeman showed this to be clearly the case. A suggestion by Freeman, Commandant of the RAF Staff College, that the country should never again support a continental ally with land forces save for a small contingent to defend air bases was welcomed by Slessor. A "National Army", he agreed, was impossible. Never again could the nation stand the strain of trying to go full out for naval, air and military measures. The General Staff themselves, he contended, were definitely moving towards this point of view, but they still had some way to go against the forces of reaction and it would be a mistake on the part of the Air Staff to try to "supercharge the Mills of God". He continued:

> ... one's got to remember that the chaps at the head of the Army, who have immense influence, social and otherwise, in this country, were my age before the aeroplane was thought of as a weapon of war and to my mind the marvel is, considering how badly on the whole the RAF was handled in the war, that they have come so far to meet our point of view.

He advised Freeman to discuss the matter with Major General R.H. Haining, then DDMOI, "a very experienced, a very

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1. *Pownall Diaries*, op.cit., 24 September 1934, p.50.

intelligent and a very progressive and broad-minded soldier".[1]

A much less charitable view of the General Staff's intentions was taken by Peck. Writing to the DCAS that month, he alleged that the Army's apparent concern to protect the Low Countries as a means of increasing home protection against air attack was, in fact, a cover for ulterior motives. He wrote:

> The security measures aspect of it will I feel sure be glossed over and it will be as the months go on turned into the first step towards the great military offensive on which they pin their faith as the offensive measure best calculated to secure victory.

Despite the fact that, in his view, the Great War had conclusively shown the supremacy of the defensive and that no innovation had changed this situation, the reliance on a land offensive was "an article of faith to many of the best military minds". There was thus a serious danger of taking it for granted that our conduct of a future war must depend upon large central land offensives. In a clear reference to strategic bombing - though the phrase itself was studiously avoided - Peck added:

> I am most anxious that this tendency should not be acquiesced in until there has been a comprehensive examination of the various measures we can apply to bring pressure upon the enemy.[2]

Freeman's reply to Slessor the following month likewise questioned the Army's motives. "Are you quite sure," he asked, "that the General Staff do not visualise for us a large continental army?"[3]

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1. Slessor Papers, VIIIA, Freeman to Slessor, 8 October 1934, and Slessor to Freeman, 11 October 1934. At this time Haining was very much opposed to the concept of limited liability. See Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1936/99, talk with Deverell and Haining, 13 November 1936.
2. Air 9/8, Folio 51, DDOI to DCAS, October 1934.
3. Slessor Papers, VIIIA, Freeman to Slessor, 6 November 1934.

Two weeks later, as though to add substance to the fears of both Peck and Freeman, Montgomery-Massingberd once again accused Ellington of over emphasising the air threat. He claimed that the expansion of the German Army was as notable as that of the German Air Force. Indeed, the latter only seemed greater because it had started *ab initio*. The German Army, on the other hand, had begun from a basis of 100,000 men and expansion was taking place to a "formidable degree".[1] Then in the New Year he bluntly told the CAS that the power of the Knock Out Blow was being exaggerated. He was unable to believe that any big scale air attack could so paralyse the nation that it would be unable to continue the war. Ellington still maintained, however, that a country seizing the initiative in this way might gain a big advantage and might deal the attacked nation a blow "from which it might not be able to recover".[2] Contemporary comment was less prosaic. Charlton wrote, for example:

> ... there will be an undisciplined flight from London. .. Of those who remain, either by choice or constraint, some will have their sanity strained to the limit.[3]

In fact, the fears of both departments as to the war plans of the other were to prove fully justified. As far as the Army was concerned, such fears were clearly vindicated just three months later. The Abyssinian crisis which broke out in September revealed those very dangers inherent in divided control which had been spelled out by Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig when the Air Force was first formed, and which had been echoed down the years by members of the General Staff. As recently as October 1934, the CIGS had voiced concern over the lack of cooperation and common doctrine between the higher staff officers. If the relations between the two departments could not be improved, he had warned, then the two services were bound to drift further apart, a state of affairs which, in the event of a land war,

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1. Cab 53/4, COS 135th Meeting, 20 November 1934.
2. Cab 2/6, CID 268th Meeting, 21 February 1935.
3. Air Commodore L.E.O.Charlton, op.cit., pp.172-3. First published Spring 1935.

would result in the Government receiving conflicting advice from its Air and Army Chiefs.[1]

Such indeed proved to be the case when the COS came to examine the recommendations of the Joint Planning Sub-Committee concerning the crisis in Abyssinia.[2] Ellington insisted that his forces would best be employed in bombing Italian sources of aircraft production in northern Italy. This in his view was the surest and most effective means of crushing the Italian air effort. Montgomery-Massingberd, on the other hand, argued that the offensive against Italian aircraft production should be carried out by France, leaving the RAF free to concentrate their efforts in support of sea and land forces in the Central Mediterranean, Egypt and the Red Sea. Chatfield, the First Sea Lord, supported the CIGS. Italy had aircraft ready, he pointed out. It was not very satisfactory to leave these alone and to tell their victims that their replacements were being attacked. Ellington was not in favour, however, of leaving the entire air offensive to the French. He felt that, at the least, they would require "a slight backing from the British air forces".[3]

This controversy over the precise part to be played by the RAF caused a "pretty flap"[4] when a meeting of the COS Sub-Committee was hastily called at the beginning of December. On being informed that the Air Staff were proposing to send 12 to 13 squadrons to assist the French in their missions against northern Italy, the CIGS accused the Air Ministry of conducting a "private war of their own".[5] He had understood, he complained, that the British air contingent was to be a token force merely to keep the French up to the mark. He did not consider that the sending of so large a force had been authorised. The matter required further examination so that the views of the other services could be taken into account.

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1. Cab 53/5, COS 133rd Meeting, 9 October 1934.
2. For a broader appreciation of this crisis see Gibbs, op.cit., Chapter VI, p.187; and L.R. Pratt, *East of Malta, West of Suez, Britain's Mediterranean Crisis 1936-1939*.
3. Cab 53/5, COS 149th Meeting, 6 September 1935.
4. *Pownall Diaries*, op.cit., 4 December 1935, p.90.
5. Ibid.

Ellington, however, maintained that the word "contingent" adequately covered the proposal to send such a force. The correct strategy was to concentrate the maximum air force available against the decisive point, namely the aircraft factories, depots and aerodromes in northern Italy. Any deviation from this policy would be tantamount to weakening the main theatre in order to strengthen a subsidiary one. The CIGS deprecated what he considered to be a proposal to wage war on two fronts. He could not see that an attack on the Italian aircraft industry would have any immediate value to the battlefield. The Italian air force was not concentrated in the North.[1] Indeed, so forcefully did he express himself on this matter that later that day Montgomery-Massingberd felt obliged to send an apology to the Prime Minister for "the heat with which I spoke at today's meeting". He had been angry, he explained, at the way in which the CAS had gone back on what the Committee had previously decided.[2]

One can sympathise with the CIGS. It is clear that the Air Staff were determined to prove the value of independent air action and were prepared to resort to sharp practice in an attempt to achieve their aim. As anticipated by the General and Naval Staffs over a number of years, at the first sign of major conflict, the air requirements of sea and ground forces were readily subordinated, if not sacrificed, to the needs of strategic bombing.

Nonetheless, it can be argued that the Air Staff's case was not without substance. Ellington could plead that air support for the Mediterranean area had not gone by default. At a meeting of the COS in December 1935 he claimed that 16 squadrons had been despatched to the Middle East, bringing the total strength of the RAF in this area to 26. This was the maximum number that could be mustered without recourse to mobilisation, and it equalled the strength of the Italian air forces in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean. Further-

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1. Cab 53/5, COS 157th Meeting, 5 December 1935.
2. Cab 21/420, Montgomery-Massingberd to Hankey 6 (*sic*) December 1935.

more, he claimed that air attacks upon aircraft factories in the area of Genoa, Milan and Turin, quite apart from their immediate effect on production, would force the Italians to withdraw aircraft from the battle zone in the south.[1]

For their part, the General Staff in no way minimised the value of airpower in the overall strategy. What they objected to was not the use but what was, in their view, the misuse of airpower. Montgomery-Massingberd argued that air resources should be earmarked for the more immediate and local task of dealing with likely problems in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean.[2] Here the major threat was seen to be against Malta and the Fleet, but air attacks upon Egypt were considered likely, and the possibility of a land invasion was not ruled out. By September the GOC Egypt was drawing up plans for the defence of an advanced airfield near Sollum to enable the RAF to strike at bomber bases deep inside Libya, and by December the possibility of an invasion of Libya was being considered. In addition, it was thought that aircraft would be needed to attack Italian forces in Italian Somaliland and Eritrea, and to counter possible border incursions into the Sudan, Aden and Kenya. As far as the defence of communications was concerned, air support was deemed vital for the protection of the Suez Canal and Red Sea.[3]

Underlying the Army's opposition to air attacks upon northern Italy was the fear that air action of this nature would bring no immediate benefit. In addition, the General Staff argued that even if the claims made by the Air Staff were well-founded, such attacks were unlikely to be sanctioned for fear that innocent civilians would be killed. Indeed, the COS themselves had made it clear that attacks upon areas of civilian population were to be avoided and that, in the event of the Italians taking such action, the RAF would not retaliate

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1. Cab 53/5, COS 157th Meeting, 5 December 1935.
2. Ibid., COS 149th Meeting, 6 September 1935.
3. Air 8/189, DPR 21, Memo by COS Sub-Committee on a single-handed war with Italy, 16 September 1935, and Cab 53/26, COS Paper 421(JP), 19 December 1935.

unless "specified approval is given from Home".[1]

But the Air Staff continued to place their faith in the decisive powers of a strategic force. The policy of the Air Force, contended a junior military officer at this time, was epitomised in one word - bombing. It was to effect such a policy that the Air Force was organised, equipped and trained. Of the 91 squadrons possessed by the RAF only ten were Army cooperation squadrons and these, with the exception of a few seconded Army officers in the junior ranks, were officered and manned by the RAF.[2] A warning note was sounded, too, by an anonymous contributor to the *RAF Quarterly*. The air had an important part to play but one must be careful, he cautioned, not to be swept off one's feet. Aeroplane enthusiasts should not make the mistake of overrating the value of aircraft, either in peace or war. It should not be forgotten that in the past people had lived through unforgettable artillery bombardment and air attack.[3]

Such warnings went unheeded. The next three years were to provide ample evidence of this excessive belief in the ability and striking power of the strategic bomber.

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1. Cab 53/26, COS Paper 417, 10 December 1935.
2. Captain I.O'B MacGregor, "The Army and the Air", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXX, 1935, pp.500-502.
3. Quis, "The Universal Arm", *RAF Quarterly*, Vol.6, 1935, p.129.

PART III

THE DIVERGING ROLES OF THE TWO SERVICES, 1926-1939

Chapter 9

The Effects of Limited Liability on Inter-Service Relations January 1936 - April 1939

For the General Staff, the Abyssinian crisis of late 1935 was a vindication of their fears, so often expressed, that in the event of an emergency there would be divided counsel from the Army and Air Chiefs as to the best strategy to be adopted. As far as the Air Staff were concerned, however, the crisis served only to justify the adoption of a firm stand against what they considered to be the outmoded attitude of the two senior services, both of which continued to ignore the major, perhaps decisive, role that airpower could play when used as an independent force beyond the immediate battlefield.

Indeed, in January 1936 an Air Staff memo came out firmly in favour of the doctrine of limited liability, a doctrine which had been temptingly offered up by Liddell Hart the previous November,[1] and which was rapidly gaining support in government circles. The country, argued the memo, in order to survive, could not afford to be weak either at sea or in the air. If we were defeated in either of these spheres, then all would be lost, whereas the defeat and even the annihilation of our army on the continent would not necessarily encompass our defeat as a nation or as an Empire. Thus the nation's strategy should be based on exploiting the advantages of our insular position. With the exception of the "backsliding in 1914-18", this had been our traditional policy.

Even the need to defend the Low Countries with ground forces was of "rapidly diminishing signficance" due to the enormous increase in the speed and ranges obtained and anticipated by modern aircraft. In fact, the air was now the sphere where the offensive could be developed to the fullest extent. The striking power and consequently the deterrent power of land forces had "vanished". Indeed, to provide land forces in excess of those required for internal security throughout the Empire and for the defence of communications

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1. *The Times*, 25 November 1935. For close studies of the doctrine of limited liability see Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment*, Chapter 5, p.96; Gibbs, op.cit., Chapter XII, p.441, and Brian Bond, *Liddell Hart: A Study of his Military Thought*, Chapter 4, p.88.

and bases essential for sea and air forces, would be "courting disaster". Quite apart from the burden of attempting to compete with our continental enemies in all three spheres, the requirements of a large army on the Continent would demand a vast quantity of shipping and would seriously reduce the number of aircraft available for that offensive air action upon which adequate air defence alone depended. In short:

> Its demands on the national resources in manpower, material, money and industrial capacity would be inimical to the maintenance of sea and air power which is vital. Its operations, even if successful, would avail us nothing if we were defeated in the air or at sea.

In any Far Eastern conflict, the memo contended, land forces would play a small and purely defensive role; in a war against Italy they would only be used for ancillary tasks in support of the other services. As for the integrity of the Low Countries and the maintenance of Afghanistan as a buffer state against Russia, these were "two bogeys employed to stampede us into maintaining the intention and the cadre of a future national army". In the case of the Low Countries, British intervention could not save this area if the Germans were determined to invade them. In Afghanistan, the Khyber Pass prohibited either us or the Russians from operating in strength on the far side of such an obstruction. Air attack had made such bottlenecks insuperable obtacles to future land campaign. The country did not require, nor could it possibly afford:

> an army designed and primarily intended as a cadre upon which to build up a national conscript force for continental adventure on a continental land war scale.[1]

The Government clearly shared this view. In presenting the second White Paper on Defence early in March, the Prime Minister announced that the Army had three functions: to maintain its imperial garrisons, to fulfil its role in home defence, and "lastly", in dire emergency or war, to provide a

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1. Air 9/8, Folio 59, 15 January 1936.

properly equipped force for overseas service wherever it might be required. The prime function of the Air Force, on the other hand, he declared, was "to provide an effective deterrent against any attack upon the vital interests of the nation at home or overseas".[1]

The implications of such a policy were speedily challenged. At a meeting of the COS later that month, the CIGS doubted that a time would come when the increased range and performance of aircraft would make the need for a Field Force unnecessary. He pointed out, with some logic, that whatever increase might take place in airpower, the occupation of the Low Countries would reduce the scale of attack which might be brought to bear upon this country, whilst increasing the scale of attack which could be launched against Germany.[2]

Doubts were also cast at this time upon the validity of the German air menace. FM Sir Philip Chetwode wrote to Lt. General Sir William Bartholomew, CGS India:

> At present her air force is nothing like what it is cracked up to be as a war proposition. I never see Astor .. or Geoffrey Dawson without telling him (*sic*) what a danger Liddell Hart is. I think they see now that he is a mistake.[3]

The following month Lt.General J.G. Dill, the DMOI, complained that the "Air" were the blue-eyed boys. What Ministers would like to do would be to turn the whole regular Army into AA guns and searchlights.[4]

A more rigorous denunciation of limited liability came later that month in a paper described by Hankey as "magnificent".[5] Written by Colonel H.R. Pownall, Deputy Secretary, CID, it stressed the moral as well as the military importance of supporting France on land in the event of a war with Germany.

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1. Air 9/8, Folio 54, 3 March 1936.
2. Cab 53/5, COS 169th Meeting, 25 March 1936.
3. Bartholomew Papers, 2/3/19, Chetwode to Bartholomew, 3 May 1936.
4. Ibid., 2/4/4, Dill to Bartholomew, 9 June 1936.
5. Cab 21/509, Hankey to Sir Warren Fisher, 16 June 1936.

Occupation of the Low Countries, it pointed out, quite apart from reducing the intensity of air attack upon this country, would provide a most valuable warning system east of the Channel.

On the question of airpower, Pownall argued that if air action was likely to be as severe in its results as some of the "alarmists" averred, then German troop movements themselves would be very seriously handicapped. Limited liability was certainly an easy course to take, but it was "full of danger". The worst crime was to be "half-hearted in war". Britain could simply not afford to lose a major war and thus a maximum national effort would be required. In making this effort, the Army could call upon a large residuum of manpower and material over and above the needs of the Navy and Air Force. In his view, in any future conflict the occupation of territory would continue to be decisive. The war in Abyssinia had proved that the air menace was an additional danger and not a substitute for the danger of land attack; both had to be guarded against.[1]

The following month an article in the *Army Quarterly* likewise called attention to the effects of what it termed "the doctrine of central shock". If the Air Staff were to adopt such a doctrine, it warned, the air supply departments would be less able to fulfil the technical requirements of the other two services. The programme of design and production required for such a strategy was quite unsuited to the production and development of specialised aircraft for the Army and Navy.[2] Earlier comment by the Editor had also reinforced the General Staff's opposition to any suggestion which limited its role to imperial policing and defence. It read:

> Attractive though this suggestion sounds, especially for the taxpayer of this country, it is difficult to see how an air offensive unsupported by ground troops could be really effective in preventing

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1. Cab 21/509, Role of the Army in a Major Continental War, June 1936.
2. Major Oliver Stewart, "The Air Doctrine of Central Shock and its Effect upon Supply", *Army Quarterly*, Vol.XXXII, July 1936, p.282.

> the advance of an invading army equipped with modern armament and with air support.[1]

Liddell Hart brushed aside such arguments. The WO, he alleged, were reluctant to accept a policy of limited liability because, regardless of the risks involved, they did not "feel quite a proper army unless they were preparing for the Continent".[2] In fact, however, the Army's case was based on sterner stuff. A few days later both the CIGS, FM Sir Cyril Deverell, and the DMOI, Major General R.H. Haining, argued that the Air Force and the Navy were not in a position to force a decision by themselves. It was for this reason, they told Liddell Hart, that a large army was required for the Continent. Furthermore, they maintained that there was sufficient manpower for such a force. When the needs of the other two services had been met, there would still be five million men available for service in the Army.[3] In December the Secretary of State for War, Mr. Duff Cooper, warned:

> ... the simplest and gravest emergency which can be envisaged is an attack by Germany on France and Belgium. It has been the view of successive Chiefs of Staff and Secretaries of State for War that in that eventuality we should be prepared to send a land force to Belgium or France.

The presence of four British divisions in Flanders in August 1914, he claimed, apart from the psychological and political aspects, had probably had a determining effect on the history of the war.[4]

Cogent though these arguments might appear today, the role of the British Army was not to be so easily determined within so short a distance from the Great War. The Government, ever

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1. *Army Quarterly*, Editorial, Vol.XXXI, No.2, January 1936, pp.201-2.
2. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/132/22, Liddell Hart to Burnett-Stuart, 6 November 1936.
3. Ibid., 11/1936/99, talk with Deverell and Haining, 13 November 1936.
4. Cab 53/30, Memo by Secretary of State for War on Role of the British Army, 14 December 1936.

mindful of the need to avoid a repetition of the bloody battles of the Western Front, relentlessly pursued a policy which, in the space of a few months, was to complete that revolution in Army-Air Force relations which had been slowly taking place over two decades. In 1918 it had been the Air Force which had been generally regarded as an auxiliary arm of the senior services and which had had to struggle to carve out a viable role for itself; by the beginning of 1938, however, with the Government's official acceptance of limited liability, it was the Army which had become an auxiliary arm, obliged to struggle for an independent part to play in the major war which then threatened the peace of Europe.[1]

Playing no small part in this revolution was the growing belief in the superiority of the defence in any future land battle. Writing in *The Times* in September 1937, Liddell Hart argued that, based on a study of Army exercises over fourteen years, to organise and train an army primarily for the offensive was to stake the nation's fortunes on "a very dark horse".[2] Charlton wrote:

> Gone at one fell swoop is the necessity for military and naval action on the former scale of operation. They are now superfluous, themselves as vulnerable to a stroke from above as the populace in the mass whom they formerly defended.[3]

Nevertheless, throughout the bitter and prolonged deliberations on the role of the British Army which took up so much of their time during the late 1930s, the COS continued to show a united front - outwardly at least - both in their refusal to compare the deterrent value of land and air forces, and in their insistence upon the establishment of a field force capable of assisting in the defence of the Low Countries. Indeed, following further articles by Liddell Hart on the merits of

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1. For the pattern of Service Estimates for the years 1921-1938, seen as a percentage of the 1920 vote, see overleaf.
2. Liddell Hart Papers, 10/1937/73, published 24 September 1937.
3. L.E.O. Charlton, *The Menace of the Clouds*, p.25.

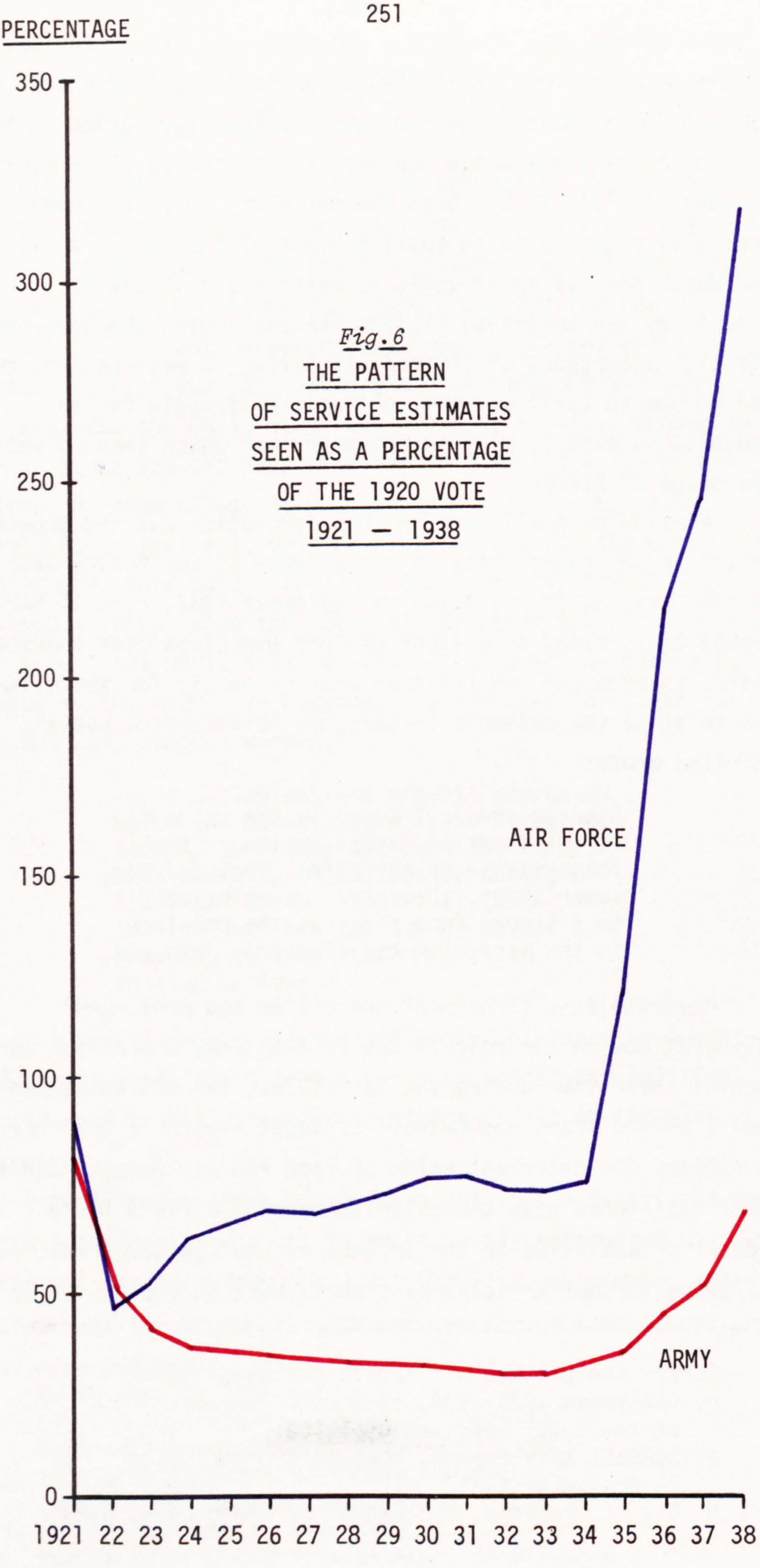

Fig. 6

THE PATTERN

OF SERVICE ESTIMATES

SEEN AS A PERCENTAGE

OF THE 1920 VOTE

1921 — 1938

limited liability,[1] a COS paper rejected the policy outright, arguing that any idea of leaving to our continental allies the burden of providing all the land forces was out of the question for political reasons. They asserted that only by making a land contribution made up of the regular Field Force and supported by the TA would France be willing to support the Belgian army. Difficulties there might be in despatching such a force to the Continent, but the German air forces had many alternative objectives and these might well prove more attractive. In the meantime, concluded the COS, they viewed the delay in reaching a decision on the role of the British Army with "the gravest concern".[2]

Despite such protestation, however, Air Staff opposition was never wholehearted. Despite formal agreement with his colleagues, Ellington continued to cast some doubts upon the advisability and the feasibility of sending a field force to the Continent. In an address to the RAF Staff College in December 1936, for example, he had been at pains to point out that whilst it was accepted policy that the Field Force must be organised and equipped for rapid despatch overseas wherever and whenever required, it was not correct to assume that the Government would immediately despatch such a force to the Continent in the event of a war with Germany. Quite apart from the diminishing value of the Low Countries from the air point of view, if Germany were to turn the full weight of her airpower against Britain at the outset of the war, all available ground forces, including the Field Force, would probably be required for internal security duties in aid of the civil powers. There was, he had emphasised, no definite commitment and no definite intention to send a force to the Continent at any given moment, it was simply a possible contingency for which the country had to be prepared.[3]

This underlying divergence in strategic thinking between

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1. *The Times*, 30 October and 2 November 1936.
2. Cab 53/30, COS Paper 550, 28 January 1937. For fuller account of COS attitude, see Welch, op.cit., Chapter 6.
3. Air 9/39, Folio 31, 16 December 1936.

the two services became more apparent when the COS met the following month. Ellington, pointing to the inherent danger of being obliged to increase our contribution once a field force had been committed, argued that this might force the nation to outrun its resources, particularly as industrial production was certain to be seriously affected by air attack in any future war. He felt that France had to be clearly informed that Britain proposed to limit its military effort on land. Deverell, reiterating the Pownall line of argument, claimed that if the nation were to avoid defeat, it had to be prepared to make an all-out effort. If an attempt were made to limit our commitment in this way, then France might well "throw in the sponge". The fact had to be faced that we might be driven to military cooperation "to the limit of our resources".[1]

A few days later Colonel G le Q Martel added weight to Deverell's argument during a lecture on mechanisation. Speaking at the RUSI, he pointed out that all military nations were building great armies as well as powerful airforces. The power to resist aggression on land in some future war might well prove "our most urgent necessity". Indeed, the nation's security might depend upon the ability to gain military control over enemy territory, for it was only by such means that absolute safety against the effects of enemy air bombardment could be obtained.[2] General Sir Edmund Ironside, GOC-in-C Eastern Command, was more forthright. He told Liddell Hart that counter-bombing was a

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1. Cab 53/6, COS 192nd Meeting, 12 January 1937. At this time the regular army was nearly 40,000 short of the 1914 figure of 186,000. See Amery, op.cit., Vol.III, p.198.
2. 20 January 1937. See *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXXII, 1937, p.281. In a report by the Sub-Committee on Industrial Intelligence in Foreign Countries, the strength of the German Army on the 1st January 1937 was put at 36 infantry divisions, three armoured divisions, and two independent brigades. The report stated, "It is clear moreover that Germany is aiming at producing a national army considerably stronger in every way than that of 1914, with the whole nation organised for war behind it." See Cab 4/25, CID Paper 1303-B, 6 February 1937.

"stupid strategy" simply because the Air Force did not have the targets offered to them that we offered to the enemy.[1] A few weeks later the WO questioned the efficacy of bombing itself. The recent attack on Guernica, they argued, had drawn attention to the limitations of aerial warfare. It had not affected materially the course of the war and it had so shocked world opinion that such action was not likely to be repeated.[2]

In the Army's struggle to retain a field force for the continent, however, Slessor's support proved more apparent than real. His prize-winning essay for the RUSI in 1936, in which he advocated a small Field Force "as a stiffener, moral and material, to our allies on land", turned out to be a mental exercise, written "with tongue slightly in cheek". The essay, he later admitted to Trenchard, was not "an honest expression of opinion". He believed, in fact, that the country could not afford again to intervene on land in a European campaign. He told Trenchard:

> ... I can't help feeling that our wealth and our overseas trade are such vitally important weapons in our armoury that we should not weaken them by spending millions more than we need on an army of a nature which is not really vital to our existence as an Empire.[3]

At the same time, however, Slessor, then DDOI, entertained doubts as to the wisdom of a strategy based primarily upon strategic bombing. He wrote to Air Commodore R.H. Peck a few weeks later:

> I think to a certain extent we have ourselves to blame in that we have overcalled our hand a bit in the past and we have, I think, overdone "the bomber will always get through" attitude.[4]

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/401, Ironside to Liddell Hart, 9 March 1937.
2. Cab 21/509, WO to Inskip, 25 May 1937.
3. Slessor Papers, VIIIA, Slessor to Trenchard, 22 June 1937.
4. Ibid., IA, Slessor to Peck (Senior Air Staff Officer, HQ India) 16 August 1937.

There was also a difference of opinion between the two Staffs over the proposed strength of the Army. Ellington agreed that the regular forces should not be reduced below five divisions, but he felt that it was difficult to justify a TA force of 12 divisions. Deverell, on the other hand, considered that that number was small enough, especially as some of these divisions might have to be allotted to AA defence. He found it hard to believe that whilst, in the Great War, we had manpower sufficient for an army of five million, we could not now maintain 12 TA divisions. And what, he asked, if Germany were to propose the abolition of aerial bombing? This would pose a "very awkward dilemma". Either we would be powerless to go to the aid of France and Belgium in any war whatsoever or, alternatively, we would have to bear the odium of being the first to violate the convention prohibiting bombing.[1]

If this last argument can be considered somewhat unrealistic in the light of Germany's massive air expansion, Ellington's reasoning at this time has even less to commend it. Whilst opposing in principle the strategy of limited liability, the CAS advocated a restriction of the Field Force on the continent, a proposal which in practical terms was as untenable politically if not militarily, as the policy of limited liability itself. As Major General C.G. Liddell warned in a letter to Liddell Hart, the possibility of sending an Expeditionary Force to the continent and of expanding it when it had reached there had to be faced. The size and composition of that force, he advised, should be decided and provided.[2]

Early the next year the two services were engaged in yet another controversy, this time over the question of home defence. This was a subject in which, as already observed, the Air Force had little faith and the Army little interest. In 1934, for example, the quality of equipment then provided by the WO had been called into question by the Editor of *Flight*

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1. Cab 53/6, COS 192nd Meeting, 12 January 1937.
2. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/446, Liddell to Liddell Hart, 28 August 1937. Liddell was then Commander, 4th Division. He was appointed Adjutant General to the Forces in December.

Magazine. The guns, searchlights and sound locators, he had complained, were all antiquated.

> That Department (the WO) is not going to stint its tanks and mechanised formations of one spanner or one gallon of petrol in order to provide new lorries to units which work with the RAF and not with the Army. We cannot altogether blame the WO .. It is a pernicious system and must lead to disaster.[1]

Indeed, at a later date the Army itself had become divided over the relative importance of home defence. As Minney points out, the older generation of soldiers considered this matter to be outside their accustomed sphere.[2] In 1937 the Secretary of State for War, Mr. Hore Belisha, had complained that Deverell's opinion that AA defence was secondary to the needs of the Field Force amounted to "criminal lunacy".[3] Not that the Air Force had shown itself to be wholly convinced of the need for extensive home defence units. No less a person than the AOC No.11 Fighter Group, AVM E.L. Gossage, speaking at London University early in 1937, had argued that air defence in its literal sense was unreliable. Absolute security against air bombardment was not practicable. Thus the bomb remained the chief instrument of airpower and the principal means by which one's aims might be obtained in war.[4]

Despite such misgivings in Air Force circles, however, the WO came under severe attack at a meeting of the CID in March 1938 following the Government's decision to give AA defence

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1. *Flight Magazine*, Editorial, Vol.XXVI, 12 July 1934, pp.699-700. This and future editorial comment referred to in this thesis was the work of the new Editor, Mr.C.M. Poulsen. Appointed in 1934 after many years on the staff as a technical advisor, he made a valuable contribution in matters concerned with Army-Air Force relations. See in particular this work, pp.273-6.
2. R.J. Minney, *The Private Papers of Hore Belisha*, p.62.
3. Liddell Hart Papers, 11/HB, 1937/58b, Hore Belisha to Liddell Hart, 19 October 1937.
4. Speech reported in *The Aeroplane*, Vol.LII, 3 March 1937, p.249.

priority over all other forms of war material. The Secretary of State for Air, Lord Swinton, complained that whilst the Air Ministry would be in a position to provide the 38 fighter squadrons required for home defence by the following year, there would be neither the necessary number of searchlights nor guns to cooperate with them. It would be clearly valueless, he pointed out, for the Air Ministry to provide aircraft if the concomitant ground defences were not forthcoming from the WO. Hore Belisha retorted that if further industrial capacity were to be allocated to the production of AA guns, the completion of the Field Force would be "indefinitely delayed". Furthermore, production was only one side of the matter. The Air Ministry, by increasing their own programme for air defence, imposed demands upon the Army over which the WO had no effective control. As a result, it was very difficult for the WO to keep any sort of balance in their overall planning. To drive home this point, the CIGS, General Viscount Gort, informed the Committee that the Field Force had no guns which could compare with those of foreign armies. Those in current use were of the 1905 pattern and had ranges well below those of modern design. In such circumstances it would be "murder" to send the Field Force overseas to fight against a first class power.[1] Ironside shared this view. "Our wretched little corps of two divisions and a mobile division," he noted in his diary, "is unthinkable as a contribution to an Army in France." The ADGB was absorbing all the money intended for the Expeditionary Force.[2]

In April, when a proposal to extend searchlight and AA coverage was under discussion, the War Minister, Hore Belisha, again warned that if home defence were to be given absolute priority, there would have to be a very drastic reduction in the equipment for the Field Force. Lord Swinton, however, agreed with the Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, that the needs of home defence should take precedence over those of the Field Force, and the proposal was adopted.[3]

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1. Cab 2/7, CID 313th Meeting, 17 March 1938.
2. *The Ironside Diaries*, 3 and 5 February 1938, p.47.
3. Cab 2/7, CID 318th Meeting, 7 April 1938.

A few months later the Air Ministry returned to their assertion that, in the event of an all-out German air attack, the allocation of army units for the maintenance of law and order should take precedence over the provision of an Expeditionary Force. Sir Kingsley Wood, the new Secretary of State for Air,[1] warned that the problem of internal security would not be confined to London; other large centres of population would also require a military presence. Hore Belisha strongly opposed such an idea, regarding it as "most wasteful" to use his service as a police force. The Army, he claimed, was made up of organised units. It could indeed be used in aid of the civil power in an emergency, but this was not its primary function; it was required for other purposes.[2]

In fact, as the General Staff had contended for many years, the German air menace had been seriously exaggerated by the Air Ministry. Only the previous month a paper initiated by Plans Branch on the subject of the bombing potential of the German air force had reported that the Heinkell 111 had a maximum range of only some 700 miles and that, based on "very good authority", it could not carry more than half of its bomb load of 4,400 lbs given full tanks and a normal take off. The range of the DO 17, too, was put at no more than 765 miles. As for the JU 86, this did have a range of 830 miles, but only a few of these aircraft were still in service. The paper questioned,

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1. He succeeded Lord Swinton, 16 May 1938.
2. Cab 2/8, CID 332nd Meeting, 15 September 1938.
   Duff Cooper had taken the same view when in office. See Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1936/40, dinner party, 14 February 1936.
   During the Munich crisis, Ironside noted in his diary: "I am told that all the authorities have insisted upon the parcelling out of troops all over London during air raids. They want the sight of uniforms to quieten the people."
   The Ironside Diaries, 19 September 1938.
   It is significant that in this dispute over matters of home defence no serious disagreement was voiced over the system of dual control. Indeed, Inskip, speaking in October 1937, could state that according to the CIGS in June 1936, there had been no friction between the two Departments and none was anticipated. See COS 219th Meeting, 19 October 1937, Cab 53/8.

too, the Air Staff's hallowed theory of the Knock Out Blow, claiming that even with bases in the Low Countries, only Germany's long range bombers were capable of attacking Britain and that, in any event, a concentrated attack of that nature would be "highly improbable whilst war is in progress against Czechoslovakia and France". The report continued:

> However much we may suspect that Field Marshal Goring would like to exploit the knock out blow theory, the fact is that the responsibility for war strategy rests at present upon General Keitel who is a soldier and is believed to have the soldier's idea that the German Air Force exists primarily to enable the Army by direct support to gain land, i.e. Czechoslovakia.[1]

There was no doubt whatsoever, concluded the paper, that the German Army Command believed in the potency of airpower in land operations.[2]

Only a few days later, an Air Staff memo addressed to the DCAS, AVM R.E.C. Peirse, reported that on the basis of two-thirds of the German air effort being directed against Britain, the maximum number of German bomber sorties worked out at 480 compared with the 1,000 envisaged earlier by the Air Ministry. Roughly speaking, therefore, if war broke out with Germany within the next two months, the country would have to face a scale of attack equal to approximately half that upon which the

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1. Air 9/90, Enclosure 1A, 24 August 1938. The Germans did try to develop a heavy bomber, the HE 177, but it came up against "technical hitches" and was never available in large numbers. See Liddell Hart Papers, 1/648, letter from Dr. J.M. Spaight, 12 May 1944. See also Edward Jablonski, *Terror from the Sky*, p.13. According to this writer, the long range four-engined bombers, the Dornier 19 and Junkers 89, were ready for flight trials late in 1936 but, with the death of Walther Wever, the Luftwaffe Chief of Staff, their development was cancelled. His successor, Albert Kesselring, concentrated on medium dive bombers.
2. Air 9/90, Enclosure 1A, 24 August 1938.

requirement of 688 fighters had been calculated.[1]

Such disclosures were not confined to the strength and nature of the German air menace. During the same period the ability of the RAF to carry out large scale long range bombing, an ability upon which the Government's policy of limited liability was firmly based, was seriously undermined.[2] The first meeting of the Bombing Policy Sub-Committee, held in March, questioned whether present bombing techniques were "on the right lines" with regard to methods, training and equipment, and alluded to the considerable effort that would be required for the destruction of certain targets under war-time conditions. It was felt that Bomber Command should hold exercises more frequently in the task of locating unfamiliar targets in order to rectify "the large bombing errors recorded in long distance flights". The C-in-C Bomber Command himself remarked that the results recorded at training camps bore no relation to bombing under war-time conditions and advocated that a definite effort be made to obtain data as to the war possibilities of bombing. The Committee concluded that there was a "crying need" for a Bombing Development Establishment which would concentrate on the necessary experiments.[3]

This lack of navigational skills was the subject of an article by a junior Air Force officer later that year. The Air Force, he claimed, would soon be the best in Europe, but it remained deficient in one vital requirement: the ability to

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1. Air 9/90, 29 August 1938. Only the previous June Newall had estimated that Germany was capable of delivering 3,500 tons of bombs against Britain in the first 24 hours of a war, followed by a daily average of 600 tons during the ensuing two or three weeks. See Cab 2/8, CID 325th Meeting, 2 June 1938.
2. Serious doubts as to the actual striking power of the RAF had been publicly aired three years earlier in an article by Squadron Leader H.V. Rowley entitled "The Striking Power of the RAF". The RAF, he had contended, was "a broken reed which, under the fierce wind of war, will not only break but will be blown away altogether". *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXX, 1935, p.144.
3. Air 9/92, Archive 31/2, 1st Meeting, Bombing Policy Sub-Committee of the Bombing Committee, 22 March 1938.

navigate astronomically.[1] According to ACM Sir Basil Embry, the Air Force showed "a light hearted approach" towards navigation up until the late 1930s.[2]

Earlier, too, serious doubts had been cast upon the ability of an air force to bomb accurately around the clock, a contention often made by the Air Staff in support of their assertion that ports on the eastern and southern coasts would be unusable from the outbreak of war. Ellington had stated in May 1934, for example, that "fairly accurate bombing" was possible at night by means of parachute flares.[3] Yet in October 1937, more than three years later, a report on sector and combined training, sent to the Air Ministry by the C-in-C Bomber Command, ACM Sir Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt, had complained bitterly of the poor results obtained during night bombing. One part read:

> ... until, if ever, we can produce equipment suitable for the purpose, we must recognise that precision bombing at night especially with high speed aircraft against unilluminated targets, i.e. in war conditions, remains a matter of very great difficulty.

This, the report revealed, was not the first time that this lesson had been clearly demonstrated. Exactly the same failing had been shown in the ADGB exercises held in July 1935 and during the winter of 1936. On the specific use of flares, Ludlow-Hewitt reported that experiments held in September 1937 with 4 inch parachute flares dropped in pairs had been unsuccessful because it had been found impossible to attach the flares securely to the aircraft. The report concluded:

> The time has now come when the limitations in the efficacy of precision bombing by

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1. Squadron Leader F.J. Fressanges, "Air Navigation and Modern Aircraft", *RAF Quarterly*, Vol.9, April 1938, p.135.
2. ACM Sir Basil Embry, *Mission Completed*, p.89. See also article by N.W. Emmott, a navigator during the Second World War, entitled "Bombing Navigation: the blind led the blind", *Proceedings of the US Naval Institute*, Vol.95, May 1969, pp.35-49.
3. Cab 53/4, COS 125th Meeting, 4 May 1934. See this work, p.232.

> heavy bomber aircraft at night in war must be squarely faced.... It is for serious consideration whether under present conditions bombing at night will not have to be regarded as in terms of area bombing.[1]

Ironside was likewise sceptical. After visiting an RAF training establishment a few months earlier, he had described the bombing practice as "primitive". Air bombardment, he had maintained, was only at the same stage as artillery had been before the South African War.[2]

Worse was to follow. In September 1938 the crisis over Czechoslovakia highlighted the fact that Britain was deficient in long range bomber aircraft - a deficiency which seriously impaired that very means of retaliation which, in the words of the Air Staff, provided "the backbone of air defence".[3] A paper by the Joint Planning Committee confirmed that the majority of the country's strike force consisted of bombers of comparatively short range which, if the neutrality of the Low Countries were observed, could only penetrate a very limited distance into Germany when operating from home bases.[4] A few weeks later Group Captain L.L. Maclean told Liddell Hart that in the event of a war, it was unlikely that the day attacks by Blenheims and Battles would reach their objectives. Whilst the maximum range of the Blenheim was 700 miles, if its speed had to be increased to avoid attack, its radius could be reduced to some 250 miles.[5]

At the beginning of October, Sir Warren Fisher, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, wrote to the Prime Minister complaining of the Air Staff's "lack of imagination and foresight", and claiming that this had been fully equalled by "their incompetence in all practical matters including strategic policy". Nor, he added, could they be acquitted of disingenuousness in

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1. Air 9/64, Folio 7, Report on Sector and Combined Training, 25 October 1937.
2. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/401, Talk with Ironside, 6 May 1937.
3. See this work, p.229.
4. Cab 55/14, JP 317, 24 September 1938.
5. Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1938/121, MacLean to Liddell Hart, 16 November 1938.

the information they had supplied to the Government.[1] Meanwhile, as far as the CIGS, General Lord Gort, was concerned, the crisis over Czechoslovakia had served only to illustrate the limitations of airpower. Why, if the German Air Force were capable of doing anything, he asked, in a letter to a colleague, was it necessary to mobilise over 30 divisions to march into Czechoslovakia? He continued:

> I am not writing this because our relations with the RAF are bad because the exact opposite is the case, but because it is time the nation as a whole came to realise that they must take a practical outlook on war and not just a sentimental one.[2]

Yet despite such adverse findings and the criticism they aroused, the Air Ministry and Air Staff continued to show an inordinate belief in the contemporary power of the strategic bomber, both as a threat and a deterrent. As late as August 1939 the CAS, ACM Sir Cyril Newall,[3] was denying vital assistance to the Fleet Air Arm on the grounds that the Munich crisis and subsequent crises had revealed a real fear of air attack upon this country. To meet such an attack, he argued, the nation had to have a strong bomber force which could "tackle the trouble at its source".[4] Nor was the Navy the only service to suffer. Air Staff obsession with the creation of a bomber force directly obstructed the WO in their endeavours to build a viable and, as events were to prove, much needed Expeditionary Force. The CAS continued to favour a limited land commitment to the Continent and, at times, came very close indeed to a total acceptance of limited liability, a policy to which the Government obstinately clung until the early months of 1939.

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1. Cab 21/902, Fisher to PM, 1 October 1938.
2. Inskip Papers, INP 1/3, Gort to Brigadier R.D. Inskip (then Commander 1st Infantry Brigade, India), 12 November 1938.
3. Appointed CAS 1 September 1937.
4. Cab 53/11, COS 310th Meeting, 2 August 1939. In 1939 the Air Staff advised that 750,000 hospital beds would be required to cope with air raid casualties. See Wing Commander H.R. Allen, *The Legacy of Trenchard*, p.63.

The attitude of the Air Ministry was no less obstructive, as shown early in November 1938. Following the Czechoslovakian crisis and the revision of Scheme 'L', the Air Force's latest expansion programme, the General Staff made a further bid for greater recognition. In October they warned the Government that, in the light of events in Czechoslovakia, it was "impossible to discount altogether the contingency of having to send military forces to the Continent at some stage of the war and perhaps at its very outset". The marked desire of the French for British assistance on land, and the decision of the Government to guarantee the future borders of Czechoslovakia, meant that measures to check a German invasion of Western Europe could rightly be regarded as a matter of home defence.[1] The following day, however, at a meeting of the Committee on Defence Programmes and Acceleration, WO proposals which sought to provide, *inter alia*, a Field Force of two fully equipped mobile divisions and four infantry divisions for a European campaign were opposed by the Air Minister, Sir Kingsley Wood. He questioned whether such proposals were relevant to the Committee's task. Since the United Kingdom could not be equally strong all round, it followed logically that the Committee ought to "concentrate on first priorities". This argument received the support of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Simon, who saw in the WO memo an attempt to "revolutionise the existing fundamental conception of the Army's task".[2]

Then at a meeting of the COS later that month, the CAS again picked up the threads of limited liability. He went so far as to suggest that all would not be lost if the Germans occupied the Channel ports. He admitted that the situation would be "very serious", and that the Port of London would not be usable, but considered that if trade were diverted to western and northern ports, the country would be able to carry

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1. Cab 21/510, Appendix 1 to Memo by Secretary of State for War on The Role of the Army in the light of the Czechoslovakian Crisis, 31 October 1938.
2. Ibid., Meeting of the Committee on Defence Programmes and Acceleration, 1 November 1938.

on with difficulty. He greatly feared that once a force were sent to the Continent the nation would be committed to unlimited land warfare. It was for this reason, too, that he opposed the equipping of the TA divisions for war. Gort, making what proved to be a more realistic appreciation of the military situation, reminded his colleagues that war with Germany would be "a life and death struggle" in which much would depend upon the extent of the German penetration into the Low Countries and France. If we made a definite promise to the French to send an Expeditionary Force as soon as possible, he thought the French would respond by assisting the Belgians and thus make possible the retention of the Channel ports. However much the Government might desire to limit its contribution on land, stern necessity might force the nation to undertake heavy commitments on the Continent. It should not be forgotten that the "keystone of the enemy's arch is Germany and until Germany is held we cannot consider any other action".[1]

An article in the *RUSI Journal* that month showed support for this point of view at the grass roots. Written by an Infantry officer, it considered that it would be most unfortunate if, when the necessity arose to expand the Army, the public were to believe that men were being drafted into it "only because obtuse Generals had not yet realised that the war could be won by air action alone". Some wars could doubtless be won by such means, but the most dangerous could not be. Unfortunately, a country had to make war as it had to and not as it would like to.[2] Even Liddell Hart admitted that the Munich crisis had weakened the chances of avoiding a commitment of land forces to the Continent. The possibility of having to supplement the French land defences had now to be considered.[3]

The French certainly thought so. Sir Eric Phipps, British Ambassador in Paris, reported that the French viewed an

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1. Cab 53/10, COS 265th Meeting, 21 November 1938.
2. Captain H.M. Curteis, "The Doctrine of Limited Liability", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXXIII, 1938, p.701.
3. Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1938/123, Speech at private luncheon, 30 November 1938.

Expeditionary Force of 70,000 men as inadequate. No Frenchman, he had been told by M. Beranger, the President of the Senate Commission for Foreign Affairs, would understand why so small a force should be provided when he himself was one among three million of his fellow countrymen mobilised for land warfare. The French appreciated the valuable contribution to be made by the British Navy and Air Force, but pointed out that they also had a Navy and a not inconsiderable Air Force. This in no way affected the disparity between the number of Frenchmen and Englishmen risking their lives on land.[1] At bottom, noted Pownall early in the New Year, Newall's opposition to the expansion of the Army was financial. If extra money were available, then he wanted it for his Air Force. "As though," he added, "he hadn't had the moon already."[2]

Two weeks later Newall again came out strongly against a continental land commitment on the grounds that once sent, it would be impossible to "turn off the tap". Despite the reports from the British Embassy in Paris, he felt that there was a danger of being "stampeded into an unsound long-term policy by outcries such as the supposed effect on contemporary French public opinion or the hopes of the French General Staff". Taking into account the financial resources of Britain and France, the needs of home defence, and the probable necessity for a considerable body of troops to maintain order and morale, he held that we could not provide a full continental commitment on land in addition to the maintenance of a Navy and Air Force. It might be necessary, as an interim policy, to have a force ready for the Continent, but it was important to educate the French to realise that we were not obliged to give such assistance.

In reply, Gort admitted that strategic mobility as opposed to continental commitment was a very attractive idea politically and one which had been feasible in the days of sail when it had been possible to transport and land an army more rapidly than

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1. Cab 21/510, Phipps to Viscount Halifax, 7 December 1938.
2. *Pownall Diaries*, op.cit., 2 January 1939, p.179.

a defending army could march to oppose it. Today, however, it was a question of steamer versus locomotive, and the latter always won. As far as the French were concerned, he argued, it was inconceivable that the Maginot Line, however strong, could be held in passive defence for an indefinite period. Sooner or later a break was bound to occur. If we did not promise aid from the outset, the French could accuse us of "sitting on the fence" and could rightly question our good faith. Win or lose, we had to throw everything into the battle.[1] The Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Roger Backhouse, supported these views. Indeed, so strongly did he do so that, according to Pownall, Newall felt obliged to put aside his own misgivings concerning a continental land commitment. In his account of the meeting Pownall wrote:

> The CAS was a very doubtful factor at first but came round well in the end. I fancy not so much because he really believes in it - or likes it - as because Backhouse came down so strongly on our side.[2]

Thus the Sub-Committee's recommendations, set out in a paper a week later, came out strongly in favour of increasing the strength of the Field Force in order that it might intervene in a Continental conflict. It warned:

> If France were overrun and forced to her knees not only would the further prosecution of the war be compromised, but we should have already failed in one of the main objects for which we entered the war, namely the defence of France.

The Army, argued the COS, should not be limited to "a scale suitable for a Second Class theatre of operations". In addition to a colonial force for imperial duties, a Field Force with full equipment and reserves should be ready on the outbreak of war, and four TA divisions, likewise battle-worthy, should be available four months later.[3]

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1. Cab 53/10, COS 268th Meeting, 18 January 1939.
2. *Pownall Diaries*, op.cit., 23 January 1939, p.184.
3. Cab 4/29, CID Paper 1532-B, 25 January 1939.

The next day, at a meeting of the CID, Hore Belisha, the War Minister who only a year previously had thrust the policy of limited liability down the throats of a protesting General Staff, proposed that the doctrine should be revoked. It was now clear, he admitted, that any future war would be "a struggle for our very existence".[1] The following month, at a meeting of Ministers, the Prime Minister himself, faced with the prospect of France denying aid to Belgium if Britain refused to make a land contribution, belatedly recognised that such a contribution might be necessary. He anticipated that such a force would comprise two regular divisions and one mobile division for immediate despatch, and two regular and four TA divisions for reinforcement at a later date.[2] The doctrine of limited liability was dead.

For the General Staff it was, in the words of Pownall, "a great victory".[3] Whilst it is true that the COS had managed to speak with one voice in their opposition to limited liability, nevertheless, within the Sub-Committee itself, support from the CAS had often been grudgingly given. Despite his pro-Army leanings, Ellington had made much, too much it might be claimed, of the difficulties involved in sending a force to the continent, whilst his successor had clearly shown a great deal of sympathy with the fundamentals of limited liability. Indeed, in the case of Newall, it is debatable whether his undisguised opposition to a continental commitment might not have resulted in deadlock within the COS Sub-Committee had it not been for the staunch support given to the CIGS by Admiral Lord Chatfield and Admiral Sir Roger Backhouse. In the CID, too, Lord Swinton and Sir Kingsley Wood had given scant support to the Army's case, determined for the most part, it would seem, to confine the Army's role to the ancillary duties associated with home defence and aid to the civil power.

On the broader issues involved, it is likewise arguable that if, towards the end of 1937, the Air Ministry had provided

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1. Cab 2/8, CID 345th Meeting, 26 January 1939.
2. Cab 21/511, Ministerial Meeting, 17 February 1939.
3. *Pownall Diaries*, op.cit., 20 February 1939, p.189.

the Government with a more balanced, accurate appreciation of their potential as an independent bomber force - as, indeed, they produced for themselves a year later[1] - the doctrine of limited liability itself would have been considered less tenable. Indeed, it might well have affected the Government's basic attitude to a continental commitment had it been known earlier that Britain's air striking force - a major part of Britain's contribution to the allied cause and one expressly provided in lieu of ground forces - was decidedly suspect both as to performance and efficiency. As two writers later put it - not without a measure of overstatement:

> If the spiritual home of the appeasers was at Cliveden, their happiest working hours were spent in the Air Ministry. From here poured forth the facts and figures that made war seem impossible; the true opiate of the appeasers.[2]

What is beyond contention is that the doctrine of limited liability, concentrating as it did upon the strength of our naval and air forces, deprived the Army of valuable funds during sixteen crucial months from December 1937, when the policy was formally recognised, until April 1939 when, following Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Cabinet officially untied the purse strings and approved a Field Force of no less than 32 divisions.[3] Throughout most of that period the Army's Field Force was geared down to the level of colonial warfare and "equipped for an Eastern theatre".[4]

In April 1939 all this was changed. Postan writes:

> Henceforth the WO could plan on the assumption that in the defence of the country and in the general conduct of the war the Army's share would be as full as that of the two other services.[5]

What the WO could not assume, however, was that the belated

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1. This work, pp.260-62.
2. Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott, *The Appeasers*, p.323.
3. Cab 23/98, Cabinet Meeting, 21(39), 19 April 1939.
4. Cab 23/92, Cabinet Meeting, 5(38), 16 February 1938.
5. M.M. Postan, *British War Production*, p.72.

decision over the precise role of the British Army would put an end once and for all to their long and oft-times bitter dispute with the Air Ministry. On the contrary, the scramble for the fruits of a limited armament production was to ensure that the two departments remained on terms of mutual suspicion and distrust up to and beyond the outbreak of hostilities in September 1939.

PART III

THE DIVERGING ROLES OF THE TWO SERVICES, 1926-1939

Chapter 10

The Nature and Extent of Army-Air Force Cooperation at the Tactical Level April 1926 - September 1939

With the belated decision to commit a land force to the Continent, taken reluctantly by the Cabinet in the Spring of 1939, the dissension between the two services over the precise role of the Army gave way to a bitter dispute over the strength and composition of the air component allotted to the Field Force and the means by which this component was to be operationally controlled. These controversies, neither of which was to be successfully resolved before the outbreak of war, revealed a long-standing deficiency both in the strength and the quality of tactical air support for the Army.

By the beginning of 1939 a satisfactory settlement of the Army's air requirements was long over-due. The supply of aircraft to the Field Force beyond that provided for within the Army Cooperation Squadrons had been discussed informally soon after General Sir George Milne was appointed CIGS in February 1926. In a letter to Trenchard at that time, Milne had readily conceded, too readily perhaps, that the Government could not be expected to provide sufficient funds to furnish the aircraft required for both home defence and an expeditionary force. He had agreed, therefore, that the air needs of the Field Force should be met from squadrons allocated to home defence, if and when they were available. At the same time, he had insisted that if a force were sent overseas, it had to take with it the required air support.[1] For his part, Trenchard had undertaken to put ten Home Defence squadrons on a mobile basis as the nucleus of an air contingent for the Field Force. In addition, he had assured the CIGS that the scheme of training for the Home Defence squadrons would take into account their possible employment with the Army - though there is little evidence to suggest that this specialised need was ever met.[2]

This informal understanding between the two departments was most unsatisfactory and was not without its critics. Commenting upon the appointment of ACM Sir John Salmond as CAS in January 1930, the Editor of *Flight Magazine* took the

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1. Air 9/30, Folio 13, Milne to Trenchard, 19 April 1926.
2. Ibid., Trenchard to Milne, 28 April 1926.

opportunity of warning him of the serious problems he faced. On the question of Army air requirements he had this to say:

> The present arrangements for the supply of air units to the Army and Navy bear in every way the stamp of temporary expedients... it cannot be a matter of no concern to the Air Council that the number of squadrons allotted to work with the Army is totally inadequate to the needs of the Army in war, and that the Army shows no disposition to shoulder part of the expense. If the WO fondly imagines that in time of war the Army will be able to borrow air squadrons from the Air Defence of GB, this fond hope should be firmly dispelled.[1]

Later that year the magazine returned to this subject. The WO, it complained, seemed content to accept on permanent or temporary loan whatever squadrons the Air Ministry could afford to provide, its only concern, apparently, being to avoid payment for such a service. It was important that both the Army and the Navy should have complete control of the strength, operation and cost of its own air arm.[2]

The matter was not seriously considered again until 1935, when the Army manoeuvres of that year revealed a serious shortage of air cover both in cooperation work and close support. *Flight Magazine* reminded its readers that the Army had no "lien" on any fighters or bombers. When the Government brought the Army up to fighting strength, declared the Editor, it would be necessary to equip it with its own fighters and bombers, in addition to increasing the number of reconnaissance aircraft.[3]

A junior officer in the Royal Artillery, writing on Army air requirements at this time, took a more pessimistic view. There was little doubt, he asserted, that as the aerial demands of the Army became more exacting, the willingness and ability of the Air Force to meet them would tend to decrease. The Air Force, he feared, regarded aerial operations with the Army as

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1. *Flight Magazine*, Vol.XXII, 3 January 1930, p.2.
2. Ibid., 11 August 1930, p.410.
3. Ibid., Vol.XXVIII, 26 September 1935, p.324.

"sidelines" which only served to divert them from the main policy. As such, they were not likely to be encouraged.[1]

His fears were proved justified the following month when, in order to meet the requirements of the Western Plan, then in the course of preparation, the two departments met to review the Army's air needs. The WO, obviously anxious to obtain a more definite undertaking, asked for seven bomber and five fighter squadrons to accompany the first Army contingent, and a further six bomber and four fighter squadrons for each of the three subsequent TA contingents. They asked in vain. Whilst the meeting agreed that air bombardment was "an essential part of the operations of the Field Force", the Air Ministry insisted that the limited number of bomber squadrons available made it impossible to comply with the WO's wishes. An advanced allocation of any number of squadrons to the Field Force, however small, was impracticable. It would have to be decided in the light of the situation prevailing at the time as to whether such squadrons could be provided and, if so, whether they should be placed under military command or regarded as a detachment of the AASF working in support of the Army. It was finally decided that, whilst the five fighter squadrons could be allocated, only two bomber squadrons could be considered as earmarked for the first contingent, the provision of a further six being dependent upon their availability on the outbreak of war. As far as the allotment of bomber and fighter squadrons to subsequent contingents was concerned, this was to be resolved after mobilisation.[2]

Once again, it was hardly a satisfactory solution for the Army and, as the threat of a European conflict grew, further doubts were cast upon the system. The Editor of *Flight Magazine* drew attention once more to the seriousness of the situation.

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1. Captain I.O'B MacGregor, "Second Line Aircraft: their utility in the Army", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXX, November 1935, p.765.
2. Meeting held 11 December 1935. Reference in Cab 53/50, COS Paper 924, and Air 2/2895. The number of Army Cooperation Squadrons for the regular Field Force was set at seven, but no provision was made for air transport.

He pointed out that, quite apart from doubts over the number of Army Cooperation Squadrons, it was clear that the aircraft from these squadrons would not be able to do all the air work required by the Army. They were merely "eyes in the air". They were not designed to carry out ground attacks and their employment as bombers was limited. If the Army were not to obtain specialised aircraft for this purpose, then a very serious situation would be created and one which might well result in the defeat of the Army.[1]

The Air Ministry did not see these matters in the same light. A paper by Plans Branch, drafted by Group Captain Slessor later that month, made clear where their priorities lay:

> One of the traditional and primary roles of the Army surely is to act as a goal-keeper for the Navy and the Air Force, not only at home but abroad. It is suggested that, until this role has been met on the approved scale, we are not justified in expending money or manpower on 10 or 12 Territorial Divisions which may never be wanted - particularly if by so doing we are absorbing resources which are required more urgently for Naval and Air defence.[2]

Nor did the General Staff make any headway over the matter of command. Despite their opposition to a system which was later to be described as "spasmodic allocation on request",[3] additional requirements to those provided by the air component of the Field Force remained firmly in the hands of the Air Ministry. At a meeting of the COS in May 1937, the Air Staff again insisted that in many tactical situations the relationship between the two services should be one of cooperation under separate commands.[4] Faced with such an attitude, General Sir Edmund Ironside remained pessimistic. The nation, he complained, had no combined training between its services and this meant

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1. *Flight Magazine*, Editorial, Vol.XXXIII, 10 February 1938, p.122.
2. Slessor Papers, VIIIA, Note by Air Staff, 26 February 1938.
3. Cab 21/903, Memo by Hore Belisha to Land Forces Committee, LF 39/19, 25 October 1939.
4. Cab 53/7, COS 206th Meeting, 18 May 1937.

that in any future conflict we would be defeated by countries which had evolved a "common direction".[1]

Thus at the beginning of 1939 the question of tactical command remained unsolved. In February of that year one authority noted, with commendable prescience:

> One can imagine the wrangling that would go on in the COS Committee, the CIGS protesting that the war could not be won unless the Army attacked such and such a point, whilst the CAS might object that he could not possibly spare a single fighter squadron for fear that London might be badly damaged by enemy bombers, and that all his bomber squadrons were none too many for his counter attack .. We should not envy the members of the Cabinet, who are all laymen in military matters, in having to decide between the disagreeing experts.

The only solution to the problem, he urged, was to plan ahead in peace time, allotting so many fighter and bomber squadrons for permanent service with the Army. This done, the Air Council should plan the air defence of the country on the understanding that it would not be able to use the special Army squadrons without the WO's express permission.[2]

Such, then, was the unsatisfactory state of affairs when the Army Council wrote to the Air Ministry the following month requesting that, on the basis of the allocation arrived at in December 1935, five additional Army Cooperation Squadrons should be provided to meet the immediate needs of the much enlarged Field Force.[3] Shortly afterwards, Gort raised the question of close support, giving notice to Hankey that he

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1. *The Ironside Diaries*, 21 April 1938, p.56. Ironside had, in fact, witnessed an impressive example of this "common direction" during a visit to Germany six months previously. During army manoeuvres he had watched a combined attack by 800 tanks and 400 aircraft. Ibid., 26 October 1937, p.28. Ironside was GOC-in-C Eastern Command 1936-1938.
2. *Flight Magazine*, Editorial, Vol.XXXV, 9 February 1939, p.125.
3. Dated 31 March 1939. Copy attached to COS Paper 881, Cab 53/48.

wished the CID to discuss the possibility of increasing the number of bombers allotted to the Field Force.[1]

But when the COS Sub-Committee came to discuss the structure of the higher command in France, Newall clearly showed that he was anxious to retain complete control over the bomber elements of his Force. He firmly reminded his colleagues that the AASF was an integral part of Bomber Command and that, as such, it should remain under the control of that Command. This would ensure that at any given moment the entire resources of the RAF could be employed at the decisive point, this point being agreed upon by the COS themselves. The Air Staff would continue to give the highest priority to attacks on German industrial centres, but he assured his colleagues that in the case of a sudden break-through by enemy land forces, the head of the British mission serving with the French Commander would be given authority to employ the whole of the AASF to stem the advance. Such an arrangement, he maintained, would make possible the highest form of cooperation between the RAF and the other services and would dispel, he felt sure, any idea that the Air Staff wished to "run a private war of their own".[2]

At this juncture, the CIGS accepted such an arrangement, cumbersome though it appeared to be, but two weeks later, following the Government's formal approval of the 32 division programme, he declared that the matter of air force allocation to the Field Force had been "thrown into the melting pot".

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1. Cab 21/521, Gort to Secretary CID, 17 April 1939, circulated as COS 881. At this stage the air component consisted of 2 bomber reconnaissance squadrons, 6 Army Cooperation Squadrons, 4 fighter squadrons, and 2 flights of communication aircraft. See David Divine, *The Broken Wing*, p.209.
2. Cab 53/11, COS 290th Meeting, 19 April 1939. A few weeks after the commencement of war, Ismay wrote, "It almost seems as though the Air Staff would prefer their forces under Beezlebub rather than anyone connected with the Army." See *The Memoirs of Lord Ismay*, p.104.

Casting aside the Air Staff proposals, he now sought provision of a small striking force of bombers as an intrinsic component of the Field Force, a force that would be available for the day-to-day tasks associated with the bombing of close targets. He considered that the aircraft for these duties should be of a different and smaller type than those of the main striking force, and that they should be allocated on a permanent basis.[1]

As was to be expected, Newall strongly opposed these proposals. He again warned that the dissipation of bomber requirements into "small packets" over a wide front would preclude the concentration of maximum effort at the decisive point. Furthermore, following the same line of argument, he considered that fighter support should be used to strengthen the general defences of the Allied air front in France rather than be employed for the close protection of the relatively small portion of the Allied army represented by the British Field Force.[2]

The matter was not pursued further at that stage, the question of the Army's air requirements being postponed until such time as both departments had considered the matter more closely. The following month, however, an article in *The Sunday Times* gave public airing to some of the more pressing problems related to Army-Air Force relations, and served notice thereby of those issues which were to divide the two services in the coming months. The article, written by the newspaper's Air Correspondent, W. MacLanachan, warned that the threat of vast armies of bombers had tended to "mask" other equally important war-like uses of the aeroplane. The aircraft accompanying the Expeditionary Force, for example, unlike those of Bomber Command, would be employed in attacking targets of more immediate and tactical value to the Army, a task which was

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1. Gort had expressed similar views to Liddell Hart a year earlier, advocating a slow but manoeuvrable aircraft. See Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1938/56, 20 May 1938. On this subject see also Colonel M. Everett, "Fire Support from the Air", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXXIII, 1938, p.587.
2. Cab 53/11, COS 292nd Meeting, 1 May 1939.

entirely different from that of the fighter and bomber employed elsewhere. Yet, under present arrangements, the Army would not have complete control over such aircraft, despite the fact that the purpose for which they were to be used was so closely related to counterparts in the Army - such as long range artillery and reconnaissance vehicles - as to make them inseparable from them. The article continued:

> One of the tenets of the RAF was that their machines operate in a different element; but flying itself is not a separate, specialised service, it is merely a means to an end - that of placing the pilot, observer or bomb aimer in the correct position to perform his function. With the Army that function is purely military.

In addition, the writer called for specialised training for crews of aircraft working with the Army, and maintained that the personnel concerned should belong to the service in which they were fighting. Only then, he argued, would they acquire "a thorough knowledge of the tactical considerations of the engagements in which they are to take part". Nor should these military air operations go unprotected. The wars in Spain and China had shown that bombers required fighter protection. The IAF, he claimed, not the RFC or the RNAS, was the parent of the RAF; its strategy and traditions had been strictly adhered to and, as a consequence, the Navy and Army had been relegated to positions of minor importance.[1]

Fittingly enough, the next day the WO submitted a long memo to the COS Sub-Committee on the services they required from the RAF.[2] A demand for 1,440 first-line aircraft included an increase in the number of Army Cooperation Squadrons; the provision of inter-communication aircraft on the scale of one squadron per two corps; the allotment of transport aircraft for the conveyance of troops and supplies; and an increase in fighter squadrons commensurate with the growing demand for air protection in base

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1. *The Sunday Times*, 11 June 1939. See Air 19/53.
2. Cab 21/521, 12 June 1939. Circulated as COS 924, 14 June 1939, Cab 53/50.

as well as forward areas. The largest demands, however, concerned the supply of close support aircraft and short-range bombers for a purely tactical role. The memo argued that during the last four years there had been a marked development abroad in the assistance afforded by aircraft to armies. The wars in Spain and, to a lesser degree, in Abyssinia and China, had shown the value of aircraft operating in an offensive role in close support of ground forces.[1] Indeed, a number of countries, such as France, Italy, Japan and the United States had specifically designed reconnaissance and bomber aircraft for this purpose, and Germany, whilst having no specialised units, had constructed some of their aircraft with this role in mind. Such aircraft, maintained the General Staff, were essential to augment artillery fire and to maintain the momentum of the attack once it had advanced beyond the range of the field guns. Of the control of such units, the paper asserted:

> The Army cannot be dependent for such support on the uncertain possibility that the requisite aircraft can be spared from their normal duties. For this role, moreover, the closest tactical cooperation is essential and this entails special training. A definite and permanent allotment of aircraft is therefore required as an integral part of the Field Force.[2]

The type of aircraft required for this purpose, continued the memo, need not be specially designed. It was likely that certain obsolete bombers and fighters could be employed provided that they were easy to handle and capable of operating from temporary landing grounds. Nor, the paper declared, did the WO consider that an Army air arm analogous to the Fleet Air Arm was necessary. They thought that an organisation would be preferable in which the Army, as the "user" Service, would

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1. Spaight, a moderate among air prophets, had written earlier, "The role which the air arm fulfilled throughout the Abyssinian campaign was one ancillary to that of the armies. There was little work of an entirely independent nature." See J.M. Spaight, *Air Power in the Next War*, pp.75-6.
2. Cab 21/521, 12 June 1939. Circulated as COS 924.

exercise general control, whilst the RAF, as the "provider" Service, would continue to be responsible for technical training, the administration of units, and for the provision and maintenance of aircraft and other equipment. In order to provide the necessary structure for such an organisation, it was suggested that the present RAF component of the Field Force might be expanded into an Army Command, RAF.

The paper claimed, too, that the Army had a part to play in the long distance bombing of military targets. Whilst conceding that such attacks would still be best carried out by aircraft under the control of the AASF, it felt that the C-in-C in the field should have a call upon the AASF for the fulfilment of this role. At the present time, pointed out the General Staff, no provision was made for any form of offensive support or for the supply of transport by air, although the RAF was prepared to make aircraft and sometimes units available for experimental purposes.[1] Furthermore, the Army had no established right to assistance in war from any RAF resources other than the air component of the Field Force. The memo alleged:

> Not only is there no certainty that the necessary aircraft will be available in war, but the types of aircraft available may be unsuitable and the personnel deficient in training for the tasks which the Army may require.[2]

Understandably perhaps, the Air Staff were somewhat taken aback by the extent as well as the size of the WO demands. As

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1. An article in August 1935 had pointed out that where air transport had been provided for the Army, its use had been dictated by purely temporary considerations; it had not been part of a deliberate policy. See Major J.T. Godfrey, "Winged Armies", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXX, 1935, p.486.
2. Cab 21/521, 12 June 1939. Circulated as COS 924, 14 June 1939, Cab 53/50. The supply of dive bombers for the Army did not become an inter-service issue until after the Polish campaign at the beginning of the war. The Air Ministry did conduct some limited experiments in dive bombing, however, during the interwar years. See Air 2/642 and Air 2/1068.

Slessor was later to point out, until a few weeks earlier there had been no policy for the employment of the Army in a continental role, and precious little Army to employ.[1] At a meeting convened by the CAS that same day, his senior officers showed little sympathy with the suggestion that the Army should have tactical control over a larger number of aircraft. On the other hand, there was some support for a specialised bomber for work with ground forces. The ACAS, AVM W.Sholto Douglas, freely admitted that future types of bombers, as then contemplated, were not very suitable for many of the bombing tasks required by the Army. He favoured the development of a medium bomber which could be employed both for tactical and strategic bombing. The DCAS, AVM R.E.C. Peirse, went further, suggesting the creation of a special tactical bomber force of small, handy aircraft which would work with the Army but remain under Air Ministry control. The Director of Plans, on the other hand, Group Captain J.C. Slessor, was altogether less sympathetic towards the WO demands. There was no need, he felt, to make a distinction between the two types of bombing. Tactical bombing, which was principally involved in isolating the battlefield, could be accomplished equally as well by an independent force.[2]

A few days later Newall wrote to Gort suggesting that before such important and complex issues were raised at the COS Sub-Committee, they should be discussed in the "broadest terms" at an inter-departmental conference. He felt that such a conference could reach agreement on general principles, and that separate committees could then be appointed to study in detail the three components of the Army's requirements, namely the provision of bombers, fighters and cooperation aircraft.[3] Gort agreed to this, and an inter-departmental meeting was arranged for the end of the month.[4]

In the meantime, Slessor took the opportunity to spell out his opposition in greater detail. Writing to his Chief, he took

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/644, Slessor to Liddell Hart, 13 May 1949.
2. Air 2/4130, Conference held 12 June 1939.
3. Cab 21/521, Newall to Gort, 19 June 1939.
4. Ibid., Gort to Newall, 20 June 1939.

the General Staff to task on three major counts. Firstly, he complained that they had

> opened their mouth as wide as possible quite regardless of practical considerations and, indeed, of tactical requirements.

They showed little idea, too, of the implications of their demands which, with the best will in the world, were quite impossible to meet within a reasonable time. Quoting their requirements for the first six months - 18 Army cooperation squadrons, 4 long-distance reconnaissance squadrons, 9 "support" squadrons, and 6 fighter squadrons - he stated that it was impossible to raise nine more cooperation squadrons in two months, and that the remainder could only be found by "milking" home defence and the Metropolitan air force. Furthermore, the chances of raising their full programme - some 90 squadrons - by the autumn of 1940 were nil.

Secondly, he complained that the WO proposals had not been carefully thought out on a tactical basis. Their demands for Army cooperation squadrons amounted to more than twice what had been considered necessary in 1918. In modern terms, they wanted about three and a half times the proportion of cooperation aircraft per corps or division than the Germans considered necessary and, compared with the French, the allotment was even more lavish.

Slessor's major criticism, however, centred around his third major complaint. The General Staff's proposals, he maintained, were based on a misconception of the strategic employment of Bomber Command and "an obsolete conception of the employment of airpower in conjunction with land forces". It was clear that they had learnt nothing from the lessons of the 1914-18 war and drawn the wrong conclusions from the recent campaigns in Spain and China. The RAF did not intend to use their main air striking force independently, as the General Staff alleged, but to employ it as that point where it would be of the most decisive importance. It was "nonsense" to suggest that the Army had no established right to assistance from any RAF resources. What was the COS Committee for if it were not to

ensure the proper allocation of sea, land and air forces in the light of varying strategic situations? To allocate aircraft permanently to the Field Force was a negation of the principles of flexibility, concentration and centralised control which were essential if the best use were to be made of the country's air resources. He added:

> This is a regrettable revival of the old idea which there has been some reason to think was dead, that when the soldier talks about cooperation between the Air Force and the Army he really means the subordination of the Air Force to the Army. It should be strenuously resisted.

The WO, observed Slessor, disclaimed any idea of establishing an Army Air Arm and, at the same time, proposed an organisation which would reduce the responsibilities of the Air Force to matters of production, supply and technical training. In fact, he alleged, the RAF were to be "the manufacturers, garage proprietors and chauffeurs for the Army".

On the vexed question of tactical air support, the Director of Plans argued that the bomber was not a battlefield weapon. It was wasteful, uneconomical and inefficient to allocate bombers in "penny packets" under the orders of Army Commanders. Why, he asked, was it necessary to use aircraft to attack enemy batteries in advance when they could be attacked by tanks, and when the power of movement conferred by mechanisation could be used to move forward the artillery? The bomber's task was to isolate the battlefield, thus stopping enemy reserves and reinforcements from moving in to hold up the attack.[1]

It is ironic and not a little unfortunate that this harsh commentary upon the WO paper on air requirements should have come from the author of *Airpower and Armies*, from the one man who had done more than any other serving officer to promote a

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1. Air 2/2895, Note by Director of Plans, 29 June 1939. These views on tactical air support had formed the basis of Slessor's book, *Airpower and Armies*, published three years earlier. This study had been based on a series of lectures on this subject given by him when he was an instructor at Camberley, 1931-4.

better understanding at operational level between the two fighting forces of air and land. What is certain is that, apart from Slessor's own contribution,[1] the development of Army-Air cooperation at the tactical level had been woefully meagre. As observed earlier,[2] the idea of close support aircraft had been frowned upon by the Air Ministry since the early 1920s and, in the United Kingdom at least, no serious attempt had been made to evolve tactics in this type of warfare.[3] Indeed, Army efforts to introduce low flying tactics into the exercises of Army Cooperation Squadrons had been positively discouraged. In a letter to Liddell Hart in 1966, Lt.General Sir Charles Broad recalled how he had visited an RAF practice camp in the late 1920s and persuaded some of the pilots to give a demonstration of ground straffing. Shortly afterwards, he added, the WO "got a raspberry" for allowing their officers to encourage young pilots to act "against official Air Ministry policy".[4] The Army Cooperation Report of 1928 likewise warned that the employment of fighter squadrons in close cooperation with ground forces could only be considered as "experimental" as it was by no means certain that in time of war squadrons of this type would always be available for such a purpose.[5] The Report for 1930 was even more critical. It warned:

> The original motive for the employment of fighters in peace training to attack ground targets was to accustom troops

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1. See this work, pp.292-4.
2. This work, p.122.
3. Some intensive cooperation between aircraft and tanks did take place, however, during the two years' existence of the Armoured Force, 1927-8. See Wing Commander T.L. Leigh-Mallory, "Air Cooperation with Mechanised Forces", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXV, 1930, p.568.
4. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/108, Broad to Liddell Hart, 7 January 1966.
5. Air Publication 1372. This and later reports are available at Adastral Library, Adastral House, London. This warning was repeated in the Report for 1935, Air Publication 1313. It read: "The occasion on which it may be possible to make aircraft available for low flying attacks .. will be limited."

> to practising AA measures. There is a danger that this motive may be lost sight of and that fighters may be employed in an unrealistic and impractical manner.[1]

Clinging to First World War clichés, the Air Ministry argued that successful results from such tactics could only be expected when fighters were used to "harass a retreating force". Under such conditions they might help to "turn a retreat into a rout".[2]

In February of that year a junior officer in the Royal Tank Corps posed a number of pertinent questions on this subject and revealed thereby those things which still appeared to be left undone. Was proper attention being given, he asked, to the use of aircraft in support of mechanised forces? What number of aircraft was needed and what should be their precise role? Was a special form of training required? Had, in fact, the lessons of 1918 been forgotten?[3] A more senior officer took up the same theme later that year. Brigadier A.P. Wavell, Commander of the 6th Infantry Brigade, maintained that the strategic combination of aircraft with the older arms had yet to be solved. The closest cooperation between air and land forces was essential, and such cooperation was undoubtedly easier where the air squadrons formed an integral part of the land forces, as in most continental armies.[4] In the same month, too, a retired Air Commodore conceded that the aeroplane as a means of attacking ground troops required far more serious consideration than seemed to be accorded it at that time.[5]

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1. Air Publication 1412.
2. Ibid. It is significant that the Air Ministry presumably expected the enemy to undertake low flying attacks and prepared defensive measures against them, yet they discouraged low flying tactics by their own aircraft. It is another indication of the extent to which the Air Staff had put their faith in strategic bombing.
3. Captain R.G. Lewis, "Armoured Cars and the RAF", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXV, 1930, p.137.
4. Ibid., Brigadier A.P. Wavell, "The Army and the Prophets", p.665.
5. Ibid., (November), Air Commodore C.R. Samson (Retd), "Aeroplanes and Armies", p.676.

These misgivings were borne out in 1933 when Liddell Hart, commenting upon Army manoeuvres, criticised the way in which air attacks had been conducted.[1] A year later Ellington admitted to the COS Sub-Committee that although the Army kept in close touch with their Cooperation Squadrons, "their contact with bomber and fighter units only took place at certain times during higher training exercises".[2]

The strongest blow against effective tactical cooperation, however, came early in 1935. Following the receipt of information on the development of ground attack aircraft in the United States and Italy, Plans Branch reported that, whilst a large scale "land forces" war would certainly furnish excellent and frequent targets for this form of attack, it was felt that neither in the role of the RAF in war, nor in its imperial policing duties was sufficient scope afforded for the economic employment of a specialised type of aircraft. The report considered that existing fighters and light bombers could be used if such a role were needed, though it did recommend that "some direction" was necessary as to the importance to be attached to a limited amount of training in these ground attack methods.[3]

A few months after this note was produced, the Spanish Civil War broke out and, over the next three years, was to afford ample opportunity of studying close support tactics under battle conditions. However, despite the successful employment of aircraft in combination with ground forces and the undoubted success of low flying attacks on troops and lines of communication - evidence fully reported to the COS by the Joint

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 10/1933/33, 1 September 1933.
2. Cab 53/5, COS 134th Meeting, 1 November 1934. AVM A.J. Capel, interviewed by the author in April 1977, stated that when he was Commandant of the School of Army Cooperation, Old Sarum, 1936-8, there was very little if any instruction in close support tactics. Nor did he recall any pressure being brought to bear by the Air Ministry or by the War Office for the provision of such instruction.
3. Air 9/6, Note by Plans, 28 February 1935.

Intelligence Sub-Committee in late 1937[1] - Newall remained unconvinced. Whilst he accepted the demoralising effect of such attacks, he continued to regard such methods as "a gross misuse of air forces".[2] He could claim, with some justification, that such attacks had been made in the face of little AA defence and that, in the majority of cases, they had been carried out against inexperienced and untrained troops.

An Air Staff paper at this time took up the same theme. Save in exceptional circumstances, it alleged, the results of close support attack during the Great War had been meagre compared with the losses sustained. As regards air operations in Spain, it could not be too strongly emphasised that these had to be viewed in the light of the air situation obtaining there. In any case, even against shaken troops, air attack could not approach artillery fire in accuracy, volume and duration. For aircraft, more profitable targets were to be found "farther back".[3] Gort took up the opposite view. He complained that the Air Staff were so obsessed with their independent role that they had forgotten that their real task was that of long range artillery. As a result, the Field Force was seriously lacking in air support.[4] The following year, however, an article in a military journal advocating the development of specialised aircraft for close support tactics was promptly refuted by an anonymous contributor. The supply of aircraft and crews was limited, it was pointed out, and the wise commander would be unlikely to use this weapon on tasks which his artillery could do as well if not better, thereby leaving unattacked targets beyond the range of his guns.[5]

Although caution as to the efficacy of aircraft in close support of ground forces was understandable and, to some extent,

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1. Cab 53/33, COS Paper 624(JIC), 6 October 1937.
2. Cab 53/8, COS 219th Meeting, 19 October 1937.
3. Air 9/137, Air Attack in Direct Support of the Field Force, Undated.
4. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/322, Gort to Liddell Hart, 31 October 1937.
5. *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXXIII, 1938, "Fire Support from the Air", by Colonel M. Everett, p.587, and by "Hawai Jehaz", p.740.

justifiable, the Air Staff's almost total rejection of this tactic must be open to question. Their preoccupation with strategic bombing, itself of questionable validity, made them blind, it would appear, to the true potential of aircraft on the battlefield. In studying the employment of aircraft in the Spanish Civil War and other localised conflicts, they failed to appreciate to any significant degree the closer coordination which was evolving between air and land forces.[1] Later, when they were obliged to recognise the need for direct support aircraft, they likewise failed to grasp the essential differences in the type of machine and method of control which such tactics demanded. Only a few months before the outbreak of the Second World War, the ACAS, AVM W.Sholto Douglas, was claiming that close support tactics required no specialised training. He told a meeting of the two departments that, fundamentally, all bomber training was the same and that the nature of the objectives had little effect on the methods employed.[2]

Nor did the work of the Army Cooperation Squadrons themselves escape criticism. This had been voiced as early as the mid 1920s. In an article published in October 1925, a Major in the Royal Artillery had complained that out of the 17 stations in the Air Force's Inland Area, all but two - Salisbury Plain and Farnborough - were completely out of touch with Army units. There were only four squadrons definitely allotted to Army cooperation and even in these units the pilots were not permanently assigned to this type of work.[3] Courses in

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1. Apart from official reports on air operations in Spain, articles by Captain Didier Poulain of the French Army Aviation Reserve particularly emphasised the use of aircraft in ground battles, concluding that an air force should include a number of squadrons specially designed for this type of support. Attacking near the ground, he claimed, was usually easy and fruitful. *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXXIII, 1938, pp.362 and 581.
2. Air 2/2895, Joint Committee on Air Requirements for the Field Force, 30 June 1939.
3. Squadron No.2 at Manston; 4 at South Farnborough; 13 at Andover; and 16 at Old Sarum. See *Flight Magazine*, Vol.XIX, 10 March 1927, p.135.

cooperation were held in certain centres, but part at least of Air Force teaching centred around the belief that airpower would be the predominant factor in the next war.[1]

As to the type of machine required for cooperation work, one authority saw no need for a specialised aeroplane. He argued that, except for its equipment, such an aircraft need not be inherently different from the high speed day bomber.[2] This view was not shared by all. In 1934, for example, a band of enthusiastic officers, dissatisfied with the type of aircraft then employed, formed the Royal Artillery Flying Club at Larkhill for the sole purpose of developing their own techniques. Within a few years their experiments, using light aircraft and based on the conception of an air observation post, had gained a large measure of success.[3]

The sternest criticism, however, came in 1936. In July of that year a WO memo informed a Parliamentary deputation concerned with officer secondment that, in the Army's view, these units were lacking in efficiency. It complained that normally Air Force officers only spent a short time in these squadrons, the yearly turnover being about 70%. Efficiency could be much improved, it maintained, if the number of Army officers serving in these units were increased to 75% of the officer strength.[4]

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1. Major R.G. Cherry, "The RAF and Army Cooperation", *Journal of the USI of India*, Vol.LV, October 1925, p.32.
2. *The Aeroplane*, Editorial, Vol.XXXIV, 23 May 1928, p.722.
3. For a full account of this development, see Major General H.J.Parham and E.M.G. Belfield, *Unarmed into Battle: The Story of the Air Observation Post*, and Colonel S.M.W.Hickey, "The Evolution of British Army Aviation", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.120, December 1975, p.15.
4. Air 9/8, WO Memo, 28 July 1936. The Air Ministry were opposed to such a scheme and countered with a proposal that Army officers should be available for service with other than Army Cooperation Squadrons, a suggestion which the WO, in their turn, felt unable to accept. Ibid., Folio 60, para.269.

The above is not to suggest that the Army authorities were without trace of blame. Whilst they did attempt in the last year of peace to make good the deficiencies in the air requirements of a modern army, they too, over a number of years, had been slow to grasp the true significance of airpower as it affected the land battle. Fuller himself, pioneer extraordinary in mechanised warfare, failed to appreciate the full importance of the integrated role to be played by aircraft in ground attack. His lectures on *FSR III*, his first detailed study of battle tactics, were criticised by Liddell Hart for failing to understand in depth the value of synchronising overhead blows with the "tank punch".[1] It is also significant that the 28 page booklet on the lessons of the Great War, produced by the WO in April 1934 and containing over 10,000 words, had but one sentence on the subject of close air support for ground forces, despite the enormous contribution that tactical airpower had made in the closing stages of the war. The sentence read:

> The addition of low flying assault fighters as maintained by some foreign countries is also worthy of consideration.[2]

In manoeuvres the following year, too, the WO showed little real interest or understanding in the use of aircraft. Based as these exercises were on the military lessons of the Great War, aeroplanes were only used in a proportion of 8 squadrons to a total force of 50,000 all arms. According to one observer, the regulations governing air operations, as laid down by the WO, were based on the avoidance of undue risk to pilots and ground forces. Means of indicating low flying attacks were provided - the firing of blank ammunition and the use of wing-tip flares - but so inadequate were these methods that this type of attack was not put to the test throughout the manoeuvres.[3]

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 11/1932/49, 1932.
2. WO 32/3115 and 3116, Notes on Certain Lessons of the Great War, WO, April 1934, p.12.
3. C.M.McAlery, "The Air Arm in the Army Manoeuvres", *The Aeroplane*, Vol.XLIX, 25 September 1935, p.377.

Wrote the Editor of *Flight Magazine* some years later:

> To the outside observer it appears that since the Armistice the WO has given far too little thought to the question of the air. Its attention has been concentrated almost entirely on the problems of mechanization and one cannot say that this preoccupation was wrong. The WO has been content to accept the small number of cooperation squadrons which the Air Ministry has placed at its disposal and when manoeuvres were held it has borrowed a few squadrons of fighters and bombers "for the duration".[1]

General Sir Edmund Ironside, writing as the CIGS soon after the war had begun, complained that successive Army Chiefs had "funked" tackling the Air Ministry on the question of a separate air arm. Many had preferred a quiet life, he claimed, to a struggle which would have taken years to complete.[2]

Such criticism is valid. As noted earlier, however, in the early 1920s the WO had shown a postive interest in the tactics of close support aircraft and had met with little encouragement from an Air Force intent on independent action both at home and overseas. Nor must it be forgotten that it was the Air Ministry which during these interwar years remained responsible for the science of aerial warfare. As such, they must be held principally to blame for this serious omission concerning the development of airpower as a fighting force in conjunction with ground forces. Slessor later admitted that this subject was almost entirely ignored between the wars. His own detailed study of such tactics, he pointed out, published in book form in 1936 under the title *Air Power and Armies*, had received "polite but not very serious attention".[3]

Yet some progress was made in this field. Slessor himself, despite his firmly-held view that the aeroplane was not a

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1. *Flight Magazine*, Editorial, Vol.XXXIII, 10 February 1938, pp.121-2.
2. *The Ironside Diaries*, 13 October 1939, p.142.
3. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/644, Some Personal Reflections by Sir John Slessor, September 1964, p.7.

battlefield weapon, carried out some valuable research into the employment of aircraft in direct support of infantry when stationed on the North West Frontier of India at the end of 1936. Exercises in such tactics, carried out with No.2 Infantry Brigade, Khanpur Area, revealed a number of pressing problems, not least among which was the need for a more reliable means of direct contact between aircraft and the frontline troops.[1] Also in need of improvement were the liaison arrangements between the air and land commanders. In his report on the exercises, Slessor concluded:

> .. with further combined training .. close support in mountain warfare may be very effective in helping to overcome opposition, in reducing casualties to our own troops, and in helping to speed up their movement. And the crux of the whole matter is effective communications.[2]

These experiments were important for two reasons. Firstly, they appear to constitute the only detailed study of such tactics carried out in the field by British forces during the interwar years. Secondly, they highlighted those operational problems associated with the reversal of air and land roles when such tactics are employed. As Slessor later explained:

> .. from experience on the Indian frontier in the 30s I know that in that sort of terrain it is usually a matter not of the airman telling the man on the ground where the enemy is, but the other way round - the soldier saying where the enemy shooting at him is, and getting the

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1. This particular problem was partly overcome during the early stages of the war by a communication network connecting forward light-armoured cars with a control centre manned by Army and Air Staff Officers. See unpublished work by Charles Carrington entitled *Chairborne Soldier*, Prologue.
2. Slessor Papers VD, Combined Report on Air Cooperation Training, 17-25 November 1936. Exercises in tactical cooperation were also held in Waziristan, 24 November to 15 January 1937. The Commanding Officer of 2 Infantry Brigade at this time was Brigadier C.N.Noyes.

airman to do something about it.[1]

It is evident that at this time the lessons learnt from these exercises were not considered of more than localised value. This is hardly surprising. Tactics employed on the North West Frontier of India were not likely to be considered applicable to the situation at home, where the Army's role was being kept deliberately vague, and where the nation's first line of defence rested to a large extent upon an independent bomber force. In fact, however, events were to prove that these tactics and the major problems associated with them were in no way peculiar to a particular type of terrain.[2]

Such, then, was the background to the nature and extent of tactical cooperation when the joint WO and Air Ministry Committee met on the last day of June 1939. As was to be expected, the meeting got off to a cautious start. The DCAS, AVM R.E.C. Peirse, felt that, despite some differences of opinion, the two departments were thinking along "parallel lines". The Air Staff, he announced, were already working on the specifications for a light, comparatively short range bomber for tactical support. What they were anxious to avoid, however, was the locking up of air forces on a number of "domestic" tasks by a too rigid allocation.

For the Army, the DCIGS, Lt.General Sir Ronald Adam, explained that the requirements sought were on the "broadest possible lines". The General Staff had thought it wise to put before the Air Staff the fullest requirements they could visualise. As previously agreed, the Committee then appointed sub-committees to deal with the three major aspects of the

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/644, Some Personal Reflections by Sir John Slessor, September 1964, p.11. For a favourable appreciation of these combined tactics see Embry, op.cit., p.80.
2. Slessor himself was to recall that some of the conclusions reached bore a close resemblance to some of the principles of land-air warfare which crystallized in the desert fighting of 1942 and 1943, and served so well in the later campaigns in Italy, France and Germany. See op.cit., p.128.

problem: fighters, bombers and Army cooperation aircraft. In fact, only the work of the last named was completed before the outbreak of war.[1]

The inter-departmental committee of June 1939 acknowledged at long last the Army's basic air needs, but, as the DO, AVM R.H. Peck, later admitted to the ACAS, AVM W.Sholto Douglas, it "skirted the fringes of some very controversial issues".[2] Not least among these were the problems associated with the strength and command structure of the proposed bomber force, and the type of aircraft most suitable for the task of close support. When these questions came to be discussed, the nation was already at war, and they thus provided the subject matter for the first major inter-service dispute to be faced by the War Cabinet, just a few weeks after the commencement of hostilities.

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1. Air 2/2895, Joint WO/Air Ministry Committee, 30 June 1939.
2. Air 2/2896, Peck to Douglas, 31 July 1939.

CONCLUSION

For both extent and intensity in the matter of inter-service rivalry, there is unlikely to be a more extreme example than that afforded by the relations between the British Army and Air Force in the interwar years. Even the controversy over British naval aviation during the same period - as prolonged and bitter as it proved to be - cannot compare with the width and depth of the succession of disputes which bedevilled and divided the WO and Air Ministry during the twenty years of troubled peace. There was hardly an area of contact between the two departments throughout this period where there was not, at best, friction, or, at worst, open hostility.

Clashes between the two departments following "the integration of a junior and cocky service into the British defence structure"[1] were inevitable; that these clashes need have been so violent and so extensive is by no means as certain. Nor, as some would have us believe, can this rivalry be summarily dismissed as a clash between "bigoted conservatives" and "enthusiastic radicals".[2] A dispute of such proportions cannot be explained away so easily.

It was a clash, moreover, in which the new arm was not at a total disadvantage. Despite the fact that in the immediate postwar years the Air Force was reduced to a shadow of its former self and came close to extinction on a number of occasions, it had, in its struggle for survival, some decided advantages in countering the attacks of its more senior partner. Unlike the Army, for example, which had emerged from the Great War besmirched and discredited by the blood-letting on the Western Front, the Air Force, operating high above the land battle, had gained by the end of the war a reputation and a prestige not shared by its down-to-earth partner. In addition, the desperate need for economy which, at the end of

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1. Johnson, op.cit., p.172.
2. Captain McA. Hogg, "Aeroplanes in Future Warfare", *Army Quarterly*, Vol.IX, No.1, October 1924, p.98.

the war, had worked against the new arm, was to prove its salvation by the early 1920s. The promise of imperial policing "on the cheap" was to provide a most opportune *raison d'être* for an independent air service until such time as its more specialised and fundamental role as a deterrent force took shape under the exaggerated air threat from France.

In this imperial role, too, the Air Staff assiduously cultivated an air of *mystique* around its various operations. Mystery, as Spaight points out, accounted for half the new arm's strength.[1] Airpower, as a totally new science, argued the airman, required for its development the guidance of minds which were not preoccupied with the problems of land and sea warfare. Given such claims to exclusiveness, the Army's view that the aeroplane was but another weapon on the battlefield, albeit in a third dimension, was never taken seriously. An advantage was also to be had in the concept of strategic bombing. Here, in what proved to be the Air Force's unique and enduring role, the airman was assisted by the indecisive nature of the limited amount of such bombing which had taken place in the final year of the war. Powers alleges that the RAF leaders "rued their lost opportunities for concrete performance".[2] They might well have done so, but in fact it was this very lack of conclusive evidence as to the efficacy of strategic bombing which worked in favour of an independent air striking force. Had the operations of the Independent Air Force been more extensive in the First World War, a larger question might well have been posed as to the feasibility and efficiency of the strategic bomber. As it was, the inconclusive nature of the evidence meant that imagination could be given free rein, thus generating the very stuff upon which the air enthusiast could base his wild assumptions, and the fears and doubts of the nervous politician could be sustained.

It is because of these advantages, together with the popular esteem gained by the RAF in later years, that the

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1. J.M. Spaight, *Air Power and the Cities*, p.227.
2. Powers, op.cit., p.159.

Army's case has largely gone by default. This is particularly so in the field of imperial policing and defence, where the Air Force has acquired over the years a fame and reputation not wholly deserved. The Army's case against air control, for instance, dismissed as pure obstruction by many observers, was not entirely without foundation. In Iraq, for example, where the Army can rightly be accused of dragging their feet during the transference of power, a reasonable concern was nonetheless shown over the security of ground forces under the air control scheme. The Air Staff's insistence on stationing the bulk of their ground forces at Baghdad aroused genuine fears as to the safety of these troops in the event of a general uprising on the scale of 1920. Furthermore, the defence of the Mandate from external attack - for which, it must not be forgotten, the Army remained responsible - was seriously threatened during the opening years of the scheme by a hostile Turkey to the north. Even Trenchard himself had expressed grave misgivings as to the ability of the air scheme to cope with the possibility of a war in Mosul and the threat to internal security that this would pose.

There were fears too on the part of many soldiers as to the long term effects of the methods employed in air control. Some denounced bombing as a means of coercion, whilst others argued that the scheme as a whole was too remote from the people it governed, and provided none of the civilising influences which were a feature of the Army's forward policy in India. In the opinion of Ironside, the methods employed by air control were a return to the tactics employed during the Roman occupation of Britain.[1] Such criticisms may not have been valid, in full or in part, but they cannot be considered unreasonable in the light of the conditions then prevailing.

The wider question as to the efficacy of air control as a method of imperial policing is likewise debateable. A valid appreciation of this question is not possible without a more detailed study of this particular aspect, but what can be

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1. W.E. Ironside, *High Road to Command*, p.193.

said with some certainty is that, in the long term, such methods of substitution, easier though they undoubtedly were upon the national purse, were to produce one serious casualty - interservice cooperation at the tactical level. "At last," wrote Harris concerning the introduction of air control in Iraq, "we were able to plan our action so that the air weapon worked in complete independence of the ground."[1] This "lust for regional control"[2] drove a wedge between the two fighting services and led to a running battle between the two departments in every Middle East dependency save that of Egypt. Thus in those very areas where a working relationship could have been developed, the opportunity for tactical cooperation and coordination was strictly limited or completely denied. Replaced as quickly as possible by local native levies, British ground forces had little or no chance of working with their own air force. Milne wrote in 1930:

> .. in the attempt to build up a separate air strategy the essence of cooperation is rapidly becoming lost, and we cannot be sure of getting the best value from either the military or the air forces.[3]

On the North West Frontier of India, too, Joubert was later to admit that a really intelligent cooperation might well have produced the best results, with the air providing the striking force and the ground troops "the backers up with limited objectives".[4] That this did not come about cannot be laid solely at the door of the General Staff. Indeed, this study would suggest that the Army authorities in India were well aware of the importance of the air arm in land operations and that, for the most part, they were anxious to establish a closer liaison between air and ground forces. Furthermore, it would appear that a certain measure of useful cooperation between the two arms might well have developed if

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1. Harris, op.cit., p.23.
2. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/132, General Sir John Burnett-Stewart to Liddell Hart, 14 October 1932.
3. Air 8/121, DI(AP)2, Memo by CIGS, 4 June 1930, para.16.
4. Philip Joubert, *The Fated Sky*, p.141.

the Air Staff had not constantly raised the bogey of substitution, together with the reduction in land forces that this made inevitable. As one writer put it in 1931, the system along the North West Frontier confined development to "watertight compartments and interservice competition", a state of affairs which, in war time, would lead to friction and thus endanger the common cause.[1]

Thus while the Air Force placed their faith in the bomber as a means of bringing to heel the recalcitrant tribesman, the Army remained convinced that their infantry were "the chief offensive agent".[2] As Portal was later to point out, the two services were thus pulling in opposite directions. The air method drove the tribesmen away, and the Army's punitive expeditions made them stand and fight. The two policies just did not mix.[3] What was needed, in fact, was a new, coordinated strategy. Such a strategy was indeed evolved along the North West Frontier towards the end of 1936, but the lessons learnt were not thought to be applicable outside of that rugged terrain. Thus Slessor himself, the instigator of these exercises and the leading protagonist of land-air cooperation, tended to see air support on a European battlefield as simply strategic bombing writ small. His main concern was to isolate the battlefield, not to bring air support to the battle itself.

These experiments notwithstanding, Ironside insists that the Air Staff themselves made no effort to join in any war doctrine, much less a doctrine in tactics with either the Army or Navy.[4] In this view he was supported by a senior Air Force officer, AVM E.R. Ludlow-Hewitt. He wrote in 1931:

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1. Major R.H.L. Fink, "Regional Control and the Coordination of Air and Land Forces", *RUSI Journal*, Vol.LXXVI, February 1931, p.26.
2. Major General Sir Charles Gwynn, *Imperial Policing*, p.29.
3. Lecture given by Air Commodore C.F.A. Portal, 17 February 1937. See *The Aeroplane*, Vol.LII, 24 February 1937, p.221.
4. *The Ironside Diaries*, Appendix, Paper addressed by Ironside to CIGS, 4 December 1937.

> .. our object is not to devise means by which the Air Force can do without the cooperation of the other services. This baneful influence insinuates its chill presence between the Services and lays its cold hand on every honest effort to advance the interest of interservice cooperation. .. Do not let us take the attitude that the Air Force never requires and can never benefit by the assistance of the other services.[1]

In effect, as the General Staff were not slow to point out, Army-Air cooperation was regarded by the Air Force as "a professional backwater".[2] RAF officers were not appointed permanently to Army-Air Cooperation Squadrons and no tactics were developed other than those associated with artillery spotting and reconnaissance. As one critic observed, the provision of specialised services for the Army and Navy was regarded as "a prostitution of the Air Force".[3]

It must be asked, too, whether, if the Army had been allowed to have its own air arm, the results achieved in the matter of tactical cooperation might not have been more satisfactory. It can be argued, as Roskill does, that given such an opportunity, the senior services would not have devoted a large proportion of their funds to their air arms.[4] This might be so, but it is difficult to believe that results achieved by the Army would have been worse - could have been worse - than those obtained by the two services pulling in opposite directions. In the case of the WO, too, it would certainly appear that more time and energy would have been devoted to this aspect of training. It would seem likely, for example, that commanders in the field would have encouraged the development of a tactical method of closer cooperation, regarding the aircraft as an integral part of the weapon system

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1. Air 9/12, Ludlow-Hewitt (AOC Iraq Command) to Squadron Leader G.C. Pirie, 6 July 1931.
2. Carrington, op.cit., Prologue.
3. Bernard Fergusson (Ed), *The Business of War: The War Narrative of Major General Sir John Kennedy*, p.7.
4. Roskill, op.cit., p.237.

at their disposal. The field commanders in India in the early 1920s, whilst hostile towards the claims for independent air action advanced by Salmond, were all in favour, however, of a greater degree of cooperation and coordination between air and land forces. Nor is there any reason to suppose that some form of combined operations - even though limited in scale - would not have been forthcoming had the Army remained in control in Iraq. Indeed, a year before the introduction of air control in that country, Major General G.M. Lindsay, as a commander of an armoured car group, had organised a series of experiments culminating in what came to be known as "the Ramadi Reconnaissance", an operation whereby a mechanised force operating in the desert was directed by wireless and maintained by air supply for nearly three weeks.[1] Writing to Liddell Hart in 1925, he advised:

> The war will be won or lost as far as military operations go, by a mechanised force in the air, and on the ground, working in combination. [2]

Joubert himself noted later that whilst the middle ranks of the Army gradually abandoned their efforts to obtain their own air arm, the senior officers never gave up.[3] In fact, the Air Staff's insistence on independent air action in imperial policing and defence meant, as Brancker pointed out, that the staffs of the Army and Navy, instead of being increasingly permeated with a knowledge in the use of aircraft as a weapon of war, were unable to develop such knowledge because they were denied the training and control of air forces.[4]

The actual extent to which land-air cooperation would have developed under Army control is, of course, highly problematical, but, again, a number of Army officers, notably

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/448, Obituary by Liddell Hart on Major General G.M. Lindsay, 29 November 1956.
2. Ibid., Lindsay to Liddell Hart, 1925.
3. Philip Joubert, *The Third Service*, p.81.
4. Sir Sefton Brancker, "British Air Power", *Quarterly Review*, July 1926, pp.25-26.

Ironside, Gort and Pile, all senior officers at the outbreak of war, clearly saw the aeroplane as a direct means of supporting the battle forces. Furthermore, it can be argued that the general attitude shown by Army commanders towards the use of aircraft in frontier operations and tactical exercises provides no valid criterion, for it was doubtless coloured by their lack of permanent control over what, in their eyes, was a battlefield weapon. Group Captain Haslam, it is true, recalls that when in command of the Signal Cooperation Flight, 1922 to 1924, the request for air support was usually couched in the most casual terms, such as "We are holding an exercise, you can send an aeroplane if you like".[1] But this attitude, reprehensible though it certainly was, must be seen against a background of Air Force control wherein the Army commander was always obliged to seek the assistance of another and much junior service, a service, moreover, which at Staff level showed a marked lack of interest in the use of aircraft in a tactical role. This fact might well account for much of the Army's reluctance to use airpower to its fullest extent. Even Captain Guest who, as Air Minister in 1921 and 1922, had faced the full brunt of the Army's opposition to a third service, was later to advocate that the two senior services should be given their own air arms. He stated in 1936:

> I believe it would have the effect of making the whole of the three forces air minded simultaneously which I think is vital in the present circumstances of today.[2]

In the matter of strategic bombing, too, the attitude of airman and politician alike was the product of the heart, not the head. As far as the politician was concerned, reliance on strategic bombing as a deterrent was clearly a form of escapism - a means of avoiding the static, costly land battles of the First World War. It would appear that most politicians did not enquire too closely into the facts and figures

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1. Interviewed by author 15 March 1977. See fn.3, p.124 of this work.
2. Speaking July 1936. See Air 9/8, Folio 60.

supporting such a policy lest they found them to be untenable. But responsibility for these "facts and figures" and for the policy they supported, was that of the Air Staff. Charged with the task of providing the Government with unbiassed and dispassionate information concerning air matters, it was they who saw the next war as an isolated battle of bombers, and they who clung obstinately to this contention even after their own research had thrown serious doubt upon the feasibility and efficiency of strategic bombing. As a result, this "bomb-the-other-fellow-is-the-only-way" school [1] took some years to discredit. As Howard points out, there was to be no short cut to victory via airpower.[2] In the event, however, it was only at the last hour that the air expansion programme was switched to provide the fighter protection which helped to save Britain in 1940. As late as February 1939, ACM Sir Hugh Dowding, AOC Fighter Command, was virtually a lone voice when asserting that a bomber attack upon this country would be brought to a standstill within a month "owing to the moral effect of the terrific casualties such a force would suffer when they were intercepted".[3]

As a direct result of this obsession with such bombing methods, other facets of airpower were virtually ignored. Throughout the period under review the General Staff - struggling for much of the time to retain a viable role in any future continental war - made a number of unsuccessful attempts to obtain a permanent assignment of close support aircraft for the Field Force. The Air Ministry opposed specialised aircraft for intervention on the battlefield, arguing that, in the unlikely event of such tactics being required, they would be carried out by bomber aircraft from the Metropolitan Force, if and when they could be spared. Nor, despite earlier undertakings to provide both senior services with their particular air needs, was any serious thought given to the science of tactical cooperation and the specialised training it required. Strategic bombing - as the Abyssinian crisis so

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1. Ashmore, op.cit., p.147.
2. Michael Howard, "Bombing and the Bomb", *Encounter*, Vol.XVIII, No.4, April 1962, p.22.
3. Air 16/261, Dowding to CAS, 24 February 1939.

clearly revealed - remained the be all and the end all of Air Staff doctrine, and any air threat to this country, be it from France or Germany, was adroitly exploited to encourage the development of this bomber theory. Slessor, whilst agreeing that Trenchard went in for a "certain amount of overstatement", saw such exaggeration as a means of countering the incessant opposition of the senior services to the new arm.[1] There is doubtless some truth in this, but as early as January 1918 *Flight Magazine* was warning its readers against "the habit of exaggerating which leads even the best balanced minds to think that nothing else matters but its own immediate interests".[2]

In fact, the Army authorities - although not experts in the field - made a more realistic appraisal of the effects of bombing than did the Air Ministry itself. At both the COS and CID levels, the WO and General Staff played the leading part in opposing the bland assumptions of the Air Force as to the weight of air attack which could be launched against this country and the viability of our own bomber force as a credible deterrent. They questioned, too, the very basis of the theory of bomber deterrence, pointing out that London, in the words of Churchill, was "a tremendous fat cow tied up to attract the beasts of prey".[3] Ironside commented drily that the country was at such a disadvantage in the theory of strategic bombing that only a "Ministry of no talents" could have enunciated it.[4]

Thus it was that within a few years from the end of the Great War, the tactical and strategic doctrines of both fighting services were firmly set upon widely diverging courses. The period up to 1926 witnessed the development of an air doctrine based almost entirely upon independent bombing action both at home and overseas. By the early 1930s, following the collapse of collective security and the abortive

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/644, Slessor to Liddell Hart, 18 July 1965.
2. *Flight Magazine*, Editorial, Vol.X, 3 January 1918, p.2.
3. Quoted by Theodore Ropp, *War in the Modern World*,p.289.
4. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/401, Ironside to Liddell Hart, 29 March 1937.

attempts at international disarmament, this Air Force doctrine had re-emerged confirmed and strengthened.

In the matter of imperial policing and defence, such an article of faith - reducing or threatening to reduce as it did the strength of ground forces - was to make tactical cooperation impossible or impracticable. Its effects at home were to be even more drastic. Here, the theory of strategic bombing made militarily possible the concept of limited liability. Based though this strategy was on false assumptions both as to the strength of the German bomber force and the efficacy of bombing itself, it gave credence to a doctrine which rendered the Army virtually impotent at a time when huge land forces were preparing for war on the continent. Ironside noted in his diary just one year before Britain became involved in that war:

> No army, no tactical doctrine, and no cooperation with the RAF, no material, and hopeless confusion as to the AA defence in England.[1]

Furthermore, whilst formally supporting the recommendations of the COS Sub-Committee concerning the need for a continental land commitment, in the discussion itself, the Air Staff persistently discouraged the use of the Field Force for this purpose and, at times, openly opposed any form of land commitment. In the CID, too, successive Air Ministers would lend no support to WO pleas for a more realistic appraisal of the Army's role and consequent needs. As early as 1934, as Uri Bialer points out, the Air Staff were supporting the basic tenets of limited liability,[2] and they continued to do so long after their own research had revealed both the inadequacy of their bomber force as a viable deterrent, and the incompetence of the German bomber force to wreak the havoc and destruction so confidently forecast but a few months earlier. As Blair writes:

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1. *The Ironside Diaries*, 3 September 1938, p.60.
2. Uri Bialer, "The British Chiefs of Staff and the Limited Liability Formula of 1938", *Military Affairs*, Vol.XLII, No.2, April 1978, p.98.

> They (the Air Staff) had conceived the idea of strategic bombing as a defensive reprisal deterrent. They could see no other, not even when they could not carry it out.[1]

Even if one were to accept as feasible the basic tenets of limited liability - and this in itself is difficult - it is clear that by the late 1930s the Air Force possessed nothing like the strength necessary to defend Britain and, at the same time, provide France with a sufficient air armada to compensate for the loss of a British Expeditionary Force in Flanders. Indeed, when the fighting did break out, the French were soon denied aircraft because home defence forces were clearly and dangerously inadequate.

The Army's persistent attacks upon the policy of limited liability and the theory of strategic bombing which underpinned it, together with their insistence upon the need for a land commitment in support of France and the Low Countries, must be regarded as both justifiable and laudable. However, had the weaknesses inherent in the theory of strategic bombing at this time been acknowledged earlier, and the policy of limited liability thereby undermined sooner, the effect upon the Army's role is difficult to gauge. There would doubtless have remained - as Gibbs points out - a deep-seated reluctance on the part of the British Government to provide a large ground force for the continent.[2] Nevertheless, it can be argued that, with the prospect of a limited land contribution to placate the French and thus secure the defence of Belgium, more serious consideration would have been given to the vital matter of tactical cooperation between air and land forces. As it was, when the policy of limited liability collapsed around the ears of airman and politician early in 1939, the country was left with a small, poorly-equipped Army, destined for an Eastern theatre, and almost totally devoid of any experience in land-air cooperation. Indeed, such cooperation was not perfected

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1. P.E. Blair, "Airpower and Appeasement" in *Essays to Michael Roberts* (Edited by John Bossy and Peter Jupp), p.177.
2. Gibbs, op.cit., p.318.

until the closing stages of the Second World War - and British ground forces suffered severely as a consequence.

In emphasising the shortcomings of the Air Staff's doctrine in the interwar years, and pointing out their consequences upon Army-Air Force relations, it is in no way intended to put all the blame for interservice rivalry upon the shoulders of the RAF. Indeed, in this work no conscious attempt has been made to minimise the intemperate and often unjustified hostility shown by soldiers towards the advent of the air arm. There can be no denying that there were Army officers who possessed two-dimensional minds and feet of Flanders clay. It would be surprising, in fact, if one were not to find minds which were unreceptive to new ideas in an institution as conservative as that of the British Army. It is clear, for example, that the General Staff, greatly fearing the effects of a third service upon their dwindling establishments, often attempted to deny airpower its proper and rightful place in Britain's defence system. There is little doubt, too, that in the field of imperial policing and defence, military commanders were not always as prepared to provide an opportunity for close cooperation as their public utterances would lead one to believe. Liddell Hart recalls that he found a "veiled spitefulness and palpable prejudice" among soldiers when they discussed the Air Force.[1]

Nevertheless, this research would suggest that the attitude and motives of the Army towards airpower were not as "bigoted" and "conservative" as some observers have claimed,[2] and that a new and fairer balance needs to be struck between the arguments which served to divide these two departments. The Army's case had much to commend it and anticipated many of the serious problems which were to confront the Service Chiefs and members of the Government when the coordination of the two arms was put to the ultimate test amid the rigours of war. Furthermore, if the Army can be accused of living in the

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1. Liddell Hart Papers, 1/132, Liddell Hart to Burnett-Stuart, 17 September 1932.
2. Captain McA. Hogg, "Aeroplanes in Future Warfare", *Army Quarterly*, Vol.IX, No.1, October 1924, p.98.

past, then the Air Staff can be accused of living in the future. It was not, in fact, until the 1950s, with the doctrine of Massive Retaliation, that the theories on strategic bombing advanced so confidently by Trenchard and his successors in the 1920s and 1930s caught up with reality. Trenchard might well have anticipated the doctrine of the ultimate deterrent, as Wykeham suggests,[1] but unfortunately for Britain and the world at large, the tactics of blitzkrieg came in between. As Falls has rightly commented, looking too far ahead can be as great a disadvantage in strategy and tactics as living in the past.[2]

Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig wrote in 1917, following the recommendations of the Smuts Committee:

> I desire to point out the grave danger of an Air Ministry, charged with such powers as the committee recommends, assuming control with a belief in theories which are not in accordance with practical evidence. [3]

This comment would appear to be a fitting epitaph for the relations between the Army and Air Force in those eventful and turbulent years between the two world wars.

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1. Peter Wykeham, *Fighter Command*, p.28.
2. Cyril Falls, *A Hundred Years of War*, p.294.
3. Cab 24/26, Haig to CIGS, 15 September 1917.

APPENDIX

PERIODS OF OFFICE
SERVICE MINISTERS AND CHIEFS OF STAFF
1919 – 1939

(Abbreviations shown in brackets refer to those employed in the accompanying time charts)

SECRETARIES OF STATE FOR AIR (SS AIR)	Appointed	
Winston Churchill	January	1919
Captain F.E. Guest	April	1921
Sir Samuel Hoare	November	1922
Lord Thomson (T)	January	1924
Sir Samuel Hoare	November	1924
Lord Thomson (T)	June	1929
Lord Amulree (A)	October	1930
Lord Londonderry	November	1931
Lord Swinton	June	1935
Sir Kingsley Wood (KW)	May	1938

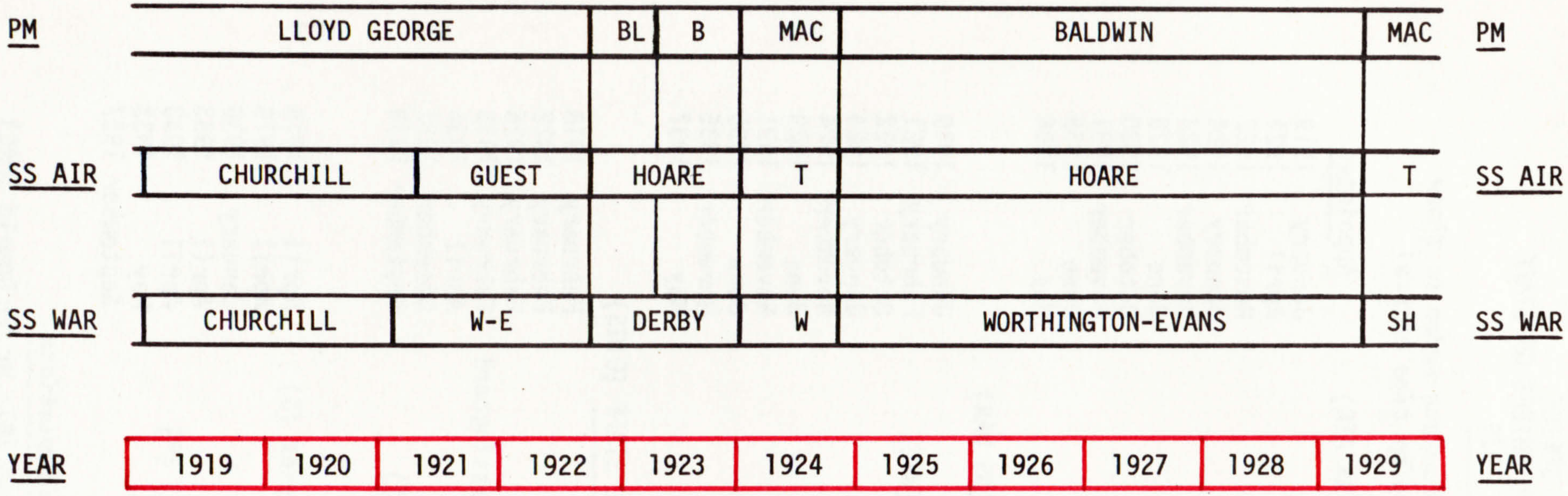
SECRETARIES OF STATE FOR WAR (SS WAR)		
Winston Churchill	January	1919
Sir Laming Worthington-Evans (W-E)	February	1921
Lord Derby	October	1922
Stephen Walsh (W)	January	1924
Sir Laming Worthington-Evans	November	1924
Thomas Shaw (SH)	June	1929
Lord Hailsham	November	1931
Lord Halifax (H)	June	1935
Alfred Duff Cooper (DC)	November	1935
Leslie Hore-Belisha	May	1937

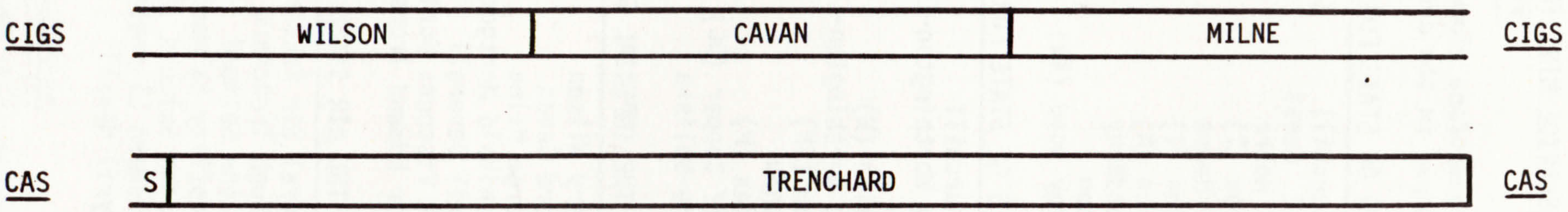
CHIEFS OF THE IMPERIAL GENERAL STAFF (CIGS)		
FM Sir Henry Wilson	February	1918
General Lord Cavan	February	1922
FM Sir George Milne	February	1926
FM Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd	February	1933
FM Sir Cyril Deverell	April	1936
Lt.General Viscount Gort	December	1937
General Sir Edmund Ironside (I)	September	1939

CHIEFS OF THE AIR STAFF (CAS)		
Major General Sir Frederick Sykes (S)	April	1918
MRAF Sir Hugh Trenchard	April	1919
MRAF Sir John Salmond	January	1930
ACM Sir Geoffrey Salmond (*)	April	1933
MRAF Sir John Salmond (Acting) (*)	April	1933
MRAF Sir Edward Ellington	May	1933
ACM Sir Cyril Newall	September	1937

Additional Abbreviations

Mr.Bonar Law (BL); Mr.Baldwin (B); Mr.MacDonald (MAC)

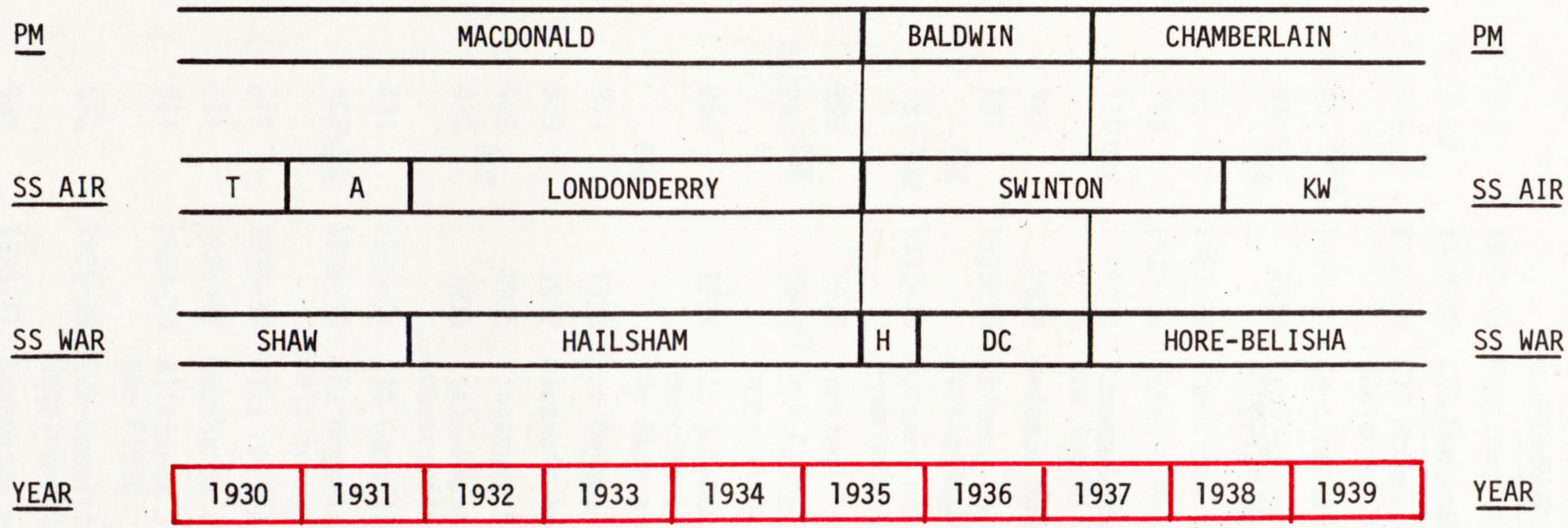




PERIODS OF OFFICE

SERVICE MINISTERS AND CHIEFS OF STAFF

1919 - 1929



PERIODS OF OFFICE

SERVICE MINISTERS AND CHIEFS OF STAFF

1930 - 1939

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109	1933-34	Defence Requirements Committee (DRC)
110	1934	Report and Proceedings of Cabinet Committee dealing with Defence Requirements
123	1934	Defence Requirements Enquiry (DPR(DR))
137	1935-39	Defence Policy and Requirements, Meetings (DPR)
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902	1938-41	Expansion of the RAF
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Cab		
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Abbreviations

AFM RAF Museum, Hendon, London.

IWM Imperial War Museum, London.

KCL The Liddell Hart Military Archives, King's College, London.

BARTHOLOMEW, General Sir William (*KCL*)

BRABAZON, Lord (*AFM*)

BROOKE-POPHAM, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert (*KCL*)

DERBY, Lord (when Secretary of State for War) (*PRO:WO 137*)

DOWDING, Air Chief Marshal Lord (*AFM*)

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INSKIP, Major General R.D. (*IWM*)

ISMAY, General Lord (*KCL*)

LEIGH-MALLORY, Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford (*AFM*)

LIDDELL HART, Sir Basil (*KCL*)

MONTGOMERY-MASSINGBERD, Field Marshal Sir Archibald (*KCL*)

NEWALL, Marshal of the RAF Sir Cyril (*AFM*)

SALMOND, Marshal of the RAF Sir John (*AFM*)

SANDILANDS, Brigadier H.R. (*KCL*)

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